University of Alberta

A Commentary on Plato's Theages

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of *Master of Arts*

Department of *Political Science*

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall 2005

0-494-09038-3

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Abstract

The *Theages* is a dialogue regarded by most commentators on Plato as spurious. But the *Theages* contains Socrates' most extensive statement on his mysterious *daimonion*, a power that affected his entire way of life. It affected especially his relationship with the young men that he spent most of his time with. Indeed, as Plato portrays Socrates, we are witness to this aspect of his philosophic activity. In the *Theages* in particular Socrates is confronted by a young man who wishes to spend time with him. Socrates also claims in this dialogue to be the most knowledgeable or wise of any human being in regard to *eros*. Thus in attempting to understand Socrates we must attempt to understand his strange claim of being affected by his *daimonion* and how his own understanding of this power relates to his knowledge of *eros*.

Acknowledgments

Over the past year I have had the opportunity to discuss Plato's *Theages* during a weekly meetings with other students writing their theses on other short dialogues of Plato. I would like to thank especially Andrew Bibby, Linda Brooymans, Paul Diduch, Laura Field, Andrea Kowalchuk, Andy Muez, and David Verbitsky.

A Special Thanks to my Professors and Advisors:

To Dr. Michael Lynn-George for introducting me to the riches of the Greek language and thereby improving the quality of my thesis. Any errors in the Greek owe to my own imperfect understanding of the language.

To Dr. Heidi Studer for her careful reading of my thesis and her many helpful suggestions and corrections. I would also like to thank Dr. Studer for the sheer amount of time and effort she has dedicated to myself and my fellow students over the years.

I cannot begin to state the gratitude that I owe to Dr. Leon Craig for his enormous sacrifice of time to aid me in this thesis. His understanding of Plato in general, and the *Theages* in particular, has shed light on some of the more difficult questions I have encountered in my study of Plato. His support and encouragement has been unrelenting, from my choice of the *Theages* for this thesis to the final draft. I am thankful for the opportuiny to study with him over the past few years.

Finally, but most importantly, I would like to thank my mother and father for their unwavering support while I have pursued these studies. I hope some day to be able to begin to repay the debt that I owe them.

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Introduction

Plato's *Theages* is today widely regarded as a spurious dialogue. This is a relatively recent change, since from antiquity to the 19th century, its authenticity was not doubted. It was accepted along with the 34 other dialogues and 13 letters as genuine. The doubts regarding the authenticity of various dialogues, including the *Theages*, began in the 19th century, mainly among German classicists led by Friedrich Schleiermacher. And although some of the dialogues that were once rejected are now again generally believed to be genuine, not all have recovered from having their authenticity called into doubt, if not simply denied. The *Theages* is one dialogue many commentators still regard as spurious.

Most commentators who have rejected the *Theages* as genuinely Platonic have done so on similar grounds. Friedrich Schleiermacher observes that "the spuriousness of the Theages has been already in recent times so often pointed out, and from such a variety of sources, that a particular allegation of proof in support of that opinion is now no longer necessary. For, such readers of Plato as can pride themselves upon any degree of critical perception or skill, will have ere this discovered the grounds of it themselves".[1] Paul Shorey begins his account of the *Theages* with the observation that "Plato could hardly have written the intolerably clumsy and scholastic first two sentences of the *Theages*, and the superstitious treatment in the last four pages of the *daimonion* of Socrates as a private oracle marks the dialogue as certainly un-Platonic".[2] In the introduction to his translation of the dialogue, W.R.M. Lamb claims that "some part of the inferiority so apparent in the *Theages* might be explained by assuming it is a work of Plato's

immaturity", a claim which Lamb himself rejects in favour of another common view that the dialogue is the work of an imitator of Plato.[3] The grounds, then, for rejecting the dialogue are, on the one hand, an objection to its "style" and, on the other hand, an objection to the content or "teaching" of the *Theages*.

Schleiermacher is correct to observe that we must answer the question of the authenticity of the *Theages* by grounding it in our interpretation. The content of the *Theages* can only be dismissed on the basis of one's interpretation of the dialogue as a whole, and then, on assessing its place in Plato's corpus as a whole. But we must be suspicious of claiming the *Theages* to be spurious from the outset, as this suspicion will certainly affect any desire to attempt to understand the dialogue apart. Whereas, one will not be harmed if one initially assumes that the dialogue is authentic; afterward, if this assumption is rendered implausible by one's interpretation, such that it does not seem to be internally coherent or congruous with Plato's other dialogues, one may provisionally conclude that it is not genuine. But given its acceptance in antiquity, it is safer to assume that the *Theages* is a work of Plato, and not merely an inferior work, but possibly an important dialogue that sheds light upon our understanding of Plato's philosophical teaching.

To judge whether it 'fits' into Plato's corpus is to assume that we have already understood all of Plato's dialogues. It is to presuppose that one has understood the thought of Plato in its entirety such that one can pronounce what fits, and what does not fit, into his "thought". In speaking about the status of the Platonic dialogues, Leo Strauss observes that: "Some of them are at present

generally regarded as spurious; but the atheteses ultimately rest on the belief that we know what Plato taught or thought or what he could possibly have written or that we have exhausted his possibilities."[4] Most commentators on the *Theages* in particular (and on the other supposedly spurious dialogues in general) proceed in precisely this manner. They reject Plato's less studied, shorter dialogues in light their understanding of the longer, more famous ones. They claim that Plato could not have shown Socrates inquiring into certain questions in a particular manner because the question which is addressed or the manner in which it is addressed or the ostensible answer which is given to a question does not immediately square with their own interpretation of the larger dialogues. Indeed, it may be no coincidence that it is mostly Plato's shorter dialogues that have been regarded as spurious. We may even say that there seems to be a prejudice against the brevity of these shorter dialogues. At best, they are often simply considered works of an "immature" Plato. But that these dialogues do not immediately fit with say, the *Republic*, actually recommends them that much more, for this potentially opens up new questions not presented, or not presented in the same manner as they occur in the other dialogues. To assume that we have arrived at a complete interpretation of all of the Platonic *kosmos* leaves us closed to the possibility of discovering an indispensable piece of the puzzle of Plato's Socrates.

The other objection commentators raise regards the stylistic elements in the *Theages* that do not seem to fit with Plato's "style" or "language" in the other dialogues.[5] This objection may be dealt with in light of the following consideration. Plato's writings take the form of dialogues. Thus Plato himself

never speaks to us directly. He speaks to us through his characters and through his titles. Plato chose the titles and the particular conversations to portray his Socrates being involved in. And the titles, while not usually mysterious, sometimes are. Plato's dialogues, then, are dramas, fictitious dramas in which he portrays a cast of characters conversing, not always but most often with Socrates. Plato created all of the speeches of all the characters in all of his dialogues. We cannot quote that Plato said this or that; we can only quote a Platonic character. We can, that is, only claim that Plato's "Socrates" says such and such, and it is not safe to assume that this is simply identical with what Plato thought or would have said. Plato and his Socrates are not identical; to mention the most obvious difference: Plato left us a vast body of writings, whereas Socrates wrote nothing. Thus, any objection to the language of any particular character must account for who that character is and why he may be speaking in a particular manner. The variety of unquestionably genuine dialogues show clearly that Plato was able to write in a number of different "styles". Therefore, we cannot assume that a dialogue is spurious based a type of character or manner of speaking that we encounter in that dialogue but do not encounter in any of the other dialogues.

The question, therefore, arises as to how one ought to approach a Platonic dialogue. We do not need to import any outside principle regarding the interpretation of a Platonic dialogue, for Plato has Socrates direct us toward the possibilities and limitations of written speech in the *Phaedrus*.[6] We must limit ourselves here to a few observations.[7] The dialogues are imitations of live speech; they are written, however, and therefore possess, in part, characteristics of both

written and live speech. Written speech is limited in one respect by the fact that one cannot ask the written word for clarification. In live conversation one may of course ask for such clarification and, as long as the person one is conversing with is willing, one can continue to seek clarification or ask for an elaboration on an unclear matter until it is resolved to one's satisfaction. Written speech does not appear to offer this possibility. But the author who is aware of this limitation of written speech may be able to imitate the clarification available in live conversation, by anticipating the questions that a certain type of reader will ask. But a further complication of achieving this is that in not all readers will have the same questions; indeed, what one person may find questionable in the matter being discussed, another will fail to notice any questions at all. Thus the author must have recourse to some means by which to answer the questions of a certain reader, while not disturbing the rhetorical effect of the conversation on the more passive reader who fails to see any difficulties or questions in what is being said. One means by which Plato achieves this, that is, 'speaking' to some while remaining silent to others, is by having Socrates use examples and analogies. These examples more or less always appear to provide evidence for the argument Socrates is pursuing. But upon further examination they hardly ever simply prove what they appear to prove. There are always more questions that these examples or analogies raise than solutions they offer to the question being pursued. Therefore, the attentive reader who spends time considering these examples may be directed towards other questions or problems that the dialogue is also addressing. The inattentive reader will simply pass over these examples, assuming

that they are simply intended to illustrate what Socrates appears to claim they illustrate.

There are at least two separate considerations as to why an author may employ such means. First, this type of writing necessarily promotes philosophic activity in a certain type of reader. The written speech of Plato's dialogues contain many difficulties and obscurities that present themselves to a suitably reflective reader. Not every reader will notice, much less attempt to solve these riddles. But Plato is a most careful writer, and appears to be especially concerned with attracting and cultivating a reader akin to himself. As Leo Strauss states: "the proper work of a writing is to arouse to thinking those who are by nature fit for it".[8] Plato is concerned with setting in motion and refining the natural qualities that a reader may possess, by their being drawn into the dialogue. The dialogues, then, introduce readers of an appropriate nature to the philosophic way of life.

The second consideration of why an author may employ these means in his writing concerns the political consequences of any literary activity. The written word suffers from the limitation of being accessible to everyone who can read or even be read to. The author is unable to choose his audience, whereas with live speech one can either choose their audience, or choose to say only certain things to a certain audience, or choose to be silent altogether. Thus written speech seems inherently 'imprudent' – it cannot be either selective or silent when it should be. But written speech may be adaptable to choosing its audience. Strictly speaking, of course, it cannot do this; anyone who can read may pick up a Platonic dialogue and read it, not only once, but as many times as one is inclined.

But the author aware of the imprudence of addressing everyone indiscriminately on the most controversial matters may adapt his speech accordingly. As Leo Strauss observes, "…the Platonic dialogue says different things to different people – not accidentally, as every writing does, but that it is so contrived as to say different things to different people…".[9] Every writing says different things to different people because each person who reads any writing brings with him beliefs, assumptions, prejudices, opinions and so on. Every reader also brings their natural fitness (or unfitness) for approaching the important questions raised in the dialogues, and this certainly affects the adequacy of their understanding.

But written speech also has certain advantages; unlike live conversation, written speech may be repeatedly revisited and re-read. This peculiar advantage of written speech allows a philosophic author to employ a range of techniques whereby to communicate subtly unorthodox views to philosophically inclined readers – those who re-read and reflect – while not disturbing the beliefs of superficial readers. We can never forget the fate of Socrates in examining any Platonic dialogue. Socrates was put to death for impiety and corrupting the youth. If subsequent philosophers are to avoid the fate of Socrates, Plato indicates that they must possess the ability to write in a manner that appears to agree with, or only mildly challenges, the regnant opinions of their polity while nonetheless radically questioning these opinions. Since philosophy is the attempt to ascend from the opinions about the most important questions to knowledge, the philosopher necessarily questions the orthodox opinions of his political situation. This places the philosophic pursuit of wisdom or truth in conflict with any

political community. Hence, this questioning must be undertaken with due regard for the good of the philosopher and the polity.

Thus Plato, aware of these problems with written speech, chose to present his thought in the form of dialogues, rather than in the 'straightforward' manner, of say, a treatise. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates compares the art of writing to an animal where each part is necessary to its function in the whole. Socrates, questioning *Phaedrus* regarding "logographic necessity" states that "...every speech, just like an animal, must be put together to have a certain body of its own, so as to be neither headless or footless but to have middle parts and end parts, written suitably to each other and to the whole". We must presume that these principles are reflexive. "Logographic necessity", then, requires that every feature of the dialogue is necessary where it occurs, and contributes to an understanding of the whole work.[10] Plato does not include any detail, no matter how small or apparently trivial, without a purpose. We may assume that Plato considered and reconsidered the placement of every speech and every deed of a dialogue. By making this assumption, we ourselves will become careful readers and will not prematurely and superficially declare problems are encountered in the dialogue.

The consideration of the importance of each part of the dialogue to the whole includes the action of the dialogue as well as the speeches. For there is action in the dialogue, and it is always related to the speech. We must observe just as much what is happening as what is being said. And the aim of seeing how each of the parts of the dialogue relates to the whole includes all of the details of the setting in which Plato chose to place the dramatic action of the dialogue. Both the

action and the setting are presumably as integral to a proper understanding of the question being discussed as the arguments that comprise the actual discussion. We must notice what happens and how it happens. This is the case, we will argue, particularly with the *Theages*. There is a drama unfolding in this dialogue that affects everything that is being said. Socrates is always speaking to Demodocus and Theages, father and son, with both always present. Whatever his intention or purpose may be in this conversation, Socrates must adapt his speech to the differing concerns of these two interlocutors. If we pay close attention to the action of the *Theages*, we will better situate ourselves to understand the questions and problems that Plato has his Socrates pursue in this dialogue.

Commentary

To begin the dialogue from what is most apparent to us, we start with the title: *Theages*. This dialogue is named after a person, not a type of person or thing, as for example *Statesman* or *Republic*, and thus it is not an unusual title for a Platonic dialogue. The majority of the dialogues are named after one of Socrates' interlocutors, typically the main one. The tendency with the dialogues where the title and the main interlocutor are the same is to focus one's interpretation on that character, somewhat ignoring the other participants. In the case of this dialogue, there is only one other character, Theages' father Demodocus; his role is not insignificant. Another preliminary consideration is that the *Theages* comes down to us with the subtitle "On Wisdom". We cannot be certain who attached these subtitles to Plato's dialogues, and therefore must be cautious in using them to guide our interpretation. In this instance, we should not begin studying the *Theages* presuming it actually is on wisdom, as we are liable to misconstrue whatever does not seem to fit this theme. However, even a superficial reading of the dialogue reveals that wisdom has a place in it. We note, though, that the paradigmatic form of Socratic question "What is…" – in this case 'What is wisdom?' – is never explicitly raised. Indeed, much of the attention given to the *Theages* focuses on Socrates' *daimonion*, leaving us to wonder quite how the first part of the dialogue, Socrates examination of Theages, relates to the account Socrates gives of his *daimonion* in what we may call the dialogue's second part.

[121a1-122d8] – The Concerns Of A Father: Demodocus' Speech

The dialogue begins with Demodocus, an elderly farmer, meeting Socrates apparently by chance and immediately asking Socrates to speak in private if he is at leisure, and even if not, to make leisure for Demodocus. From this beginning, we can infer that Socrates and Demodocus have some prior relationship. Demodocus' tone in his request suggests that he is familiar enough with Socrates to ask that he make time for him, even if he has some business. He implies that Socrates will also find his matter of some importance. Demodocus' remark regarding Socrates having or not having leisure is relevant since Socrates' way of life as portrayed in the dialogues is characterized by leisure. Thus, Demodocus may not be that familiar with Socrates' way of life.

Nonetheless, Socrates' response to Demodocus' request reinforces an impression of a friendly familiarity between the two men. He assures Demodocus that he happens (τυγχανω)[11] to be at leisure and particularly so for Demodocus. Thus, in his first speech Socrates implicitly distinguishes between different sorts of people – those one willingly makes time for and those one may not. Socrates is at leisure especially for Demodocus' sake; he may not have responded in this same manner to others who approached him. *Theages*, then, would not seem to be a compelled dialogue – Socrates readily grants Demodocus his leisure.[12] Demodocus then suggests that the conversation take place in private. The matter he wants to discuss is apparently not one that he would like others less familiar to him to overhear, much less participate in. He therefore asks Socrates if he would

like to step aside into the portico of Zeus the Liberator, thus away from the business of the agora.

Theages is set, then, in a sacred site in Athens. Plato has this be due to Demodocus, and leads us to wonder how we are to understand this specification – they could have spoken in a non-sacred place, or the location could have been left unspecified. One might be tempted to presume that this detail could have been eliminated from the dialogue without affecting its meaning or teaching. Resisting this temptation, we must ask why it is here. Shortly, Socrates will respond to Demodocus' longest speech in the dialogue by alluding to both the sacred character of counsel and the divine character of education (122b), possibly emphasizing the significance of the location.

Demodocus' speech to Socrates, his longest in the dialogue, appears to have been something he has considered with some care. Demodocus has obviously been brooding over the matters he is about to present to Socrates. Having reflected upon his concerns to some extent, his meeting with Socrates will allow him to speak about them to someone he evidently trusts. That he is pleased with encountering Socrates (122a7) may imply a lingering dissatisfaction with the decision he has taken. Or, he may simply believe Socrates to be someone appropriate to ask about the sophists, that is, likely to be knowledgeable about them. We need not suppose that Demodocus is intimately familiar with Socrates to suggest that he is aware Socrates knows more about the things of the city than does he, a farmer from the country.

Demodocus begins his speech with an observation about the genesis and growth of plants, animals, and human beings. "Socrates, all the things that grow very likely follow the same course – both the things that grow from the earth and the animals, man as well as the others. As regards the plants, it is very easy for us who farm the earth to make all the preparations that precede the planting and to do the planting itself, but when what has been planted takes on life, then a great, difficult, and vexatious tending begins. And it seems likely that the same holds concerning human beings…" (121b2-c2). Demodocus does not name this "nature" (φυσις) or the natural things. "Nature" and its related terms are not used in the *Theages*. Nevertheless, Demodocus' understanding of human beings points to their naturalness, to their being a part of the natural order that shares features with the other natural things. Thus Demodocus draws from his own experience an analogy about the cultivation of plants and the cultivation of the human being. He emphasizes the difficulty in tending to the plant after it begins to grow. He believes that human beings are best thought of in this way as well, that the natural course (τροπον) of a human being is similar to that of a plant. Demodocus' analogy, however, seems drawn in reverse: that is, he has transposed the ease with which one begets a child to that of preparing for, and planting, a plant. Though he may draw the analogy in reverse, this need not render it inappropriate. What is noticeable is the treatment of preparation for sowing plants, and the joking manner of Demodocus' mention of the child-planting or child-making. The preparation before the planting is treated as being a thing of ease. Demodocus' analogy serves his purpose, in that he is concerned with the "vexatious" tending

of the plants, and by analogy, of the troublesomeness entailed in bringing up a son. But what does Plato have in mind by Socrates' noticeable silence on the "preparation" before sowing plants and similarly human beings? Is the question of "preparation" for the "planting" of a human being of no concern to the question of the best human being? How are we even to understand "preparation" for planting a human being? The preparation before the child-making only seems intelligible if we speak of a 'matchmaking' that would bring together human beings of certain natures for the sake of producing a certain nature. Socrates speaks of such a 'matchmaking' in the *Theaetetus* as the little-known part of the art of midwifery, an expertise he claims to have learned from his mother. If human beings cannot or do not wish to control the bringing together of natures before child-planting, is there another kind of matchmaking afterwards, for 'making' the best human beings?

However this may be, Demodocus emphasizes the "vexatious" nature of the upbringing of his son, as well as its causing him anxiety and fear. He claims that of the many things that might be mentioned, he is most fearful of his son's present desire "to become wise". For Demodocus this desire is "not ignoble (αγεννης), but it is risky". He does not say why he believes this to be the case. His son's desire has arisen, he believes, because his son's companions have gone down (καταβαινοντες) into town and, returning to the country, they relate certain discussions they have heard there. Thus the youth is envious of his friends and has now begun to trouble his father to pay to place him with a sophist (or "wise one")[13] for the sake of making him wise as well. Presumably this is what

his friends have done: studied with sophists; they have not simply told the youth of discussions they have overheard, but have displayed something that he envies. After mentioning the sophists, Demodocus again alludes to the unspecified danger he believes the youth could encounter, while claiming not to be that concerned about the money that the sophists charge. The sophists were notorious for charging quite substantial amounts of money for the education that they offered.[14] But Demodocus is apparently dubious about whether this education, whatever he considers it to entail, is simply good for his son. He has held the youth back for as long as he has been able, but is now giving in out of a concern that his son will seek to frequent someone without him, regardless of his refusal.

Thus Demodocus and his son have come to town with the intent of finding a wise one, a "sophist", with whom he can be placed. So Demodocus observes that Socrates has showed up at a "fine" (καλος) moment, given that Demodocus would like to deliberate with him, presumably about which sophist he would recommend. But as noted, Demodocus also seems somewhat uneasy about his decision. We can only wonder what might have become of the farmer and his son if they had not happened upon Socrates. Moreover, that Demodocus wants to deliberate with Socrates regarding what he has just told him raises the question as to what it is about Socrates that suggests to Demodocus that he is to be distinguished from the sophists. For Demodocus only mentions that the sophists are reputed to be wise and take money for making others so; he also doubtless knows that the most famous ones are foreigners. Is Demodocus suspicious of the sophists because they take pay, or because they are foreigners, or has he heard of

their reputation for having a corrupting influence? Demodocus exhorts Socrates to give counsel on the matter if he can. His tone reflects that of the beginning of the dialogue wherein he implied the importance of the matter, thus in a manner obliging Socrates to speak with him. But it is not clear whether such an obligation would be due simply to both men being Athenians, or due to a friendship, or to another consideration altogether.

Socrates responds to Demodocus by acknowledging the common view about the sacred (ιερον) character of counsel. Socrates introduces some slight doubt, however, with his qualifying "if". Thus if any counsel is sacred, it is especially so regarding what Demodocus is concerned with: the education of his son. For Socrates observes, nothing is more divine than education.

But as quickly as he raises this claim, he cautions Demodocus that they need to consider what it is that they are seeking counsel about. Socrates contends that counsel can become confused and even ridiculous, if the one counseling has something different in mind from the one being counseled. Demodocus agrees to the way Socrates' suggests they should proceed, namely, by clarifying the issue under deliberation. Socrates emphasizes the importance of this by affirming that Demodocus is right to agree. Demodocus' unqualified agreement to Socrates' suggestion here contrasts slightly with his response to Socrates' amendment of his proposal: that they question the youth, since Socrates claims that it has occurred to him that the youth himself may desire something still different from what he and Demodocus suppose. Thus they should begin by thoroughly inquiring into what the youth desires. Demodocus again agrees, but with less certainty or

enthusiasm than before. Demodocus likely does not believe this inquiry will prove fruitful, for his son has already made clear his desire to be placed with a sophist, someone who will make him wise. Nonetheless, Demodocus agrees, perhaps for the sake of clarifying how to proceed with the practical, if unexpressed, question of who the youth should be placed with. But they never directly address this question, which Socrates could have done easily enough. Instead, Socrates pursues a different line of questioning with the youth. Of course, Socrates did not promise, strictly speaking, to return to the unexpressed question of 'who': but the manner in which he framed his change of procedure suggested to Demodocus that the desire of the youth was a question that had to be dealt with before Socrates could give counsel on the matter. Given Demodocus' concern for which of the sophists to place his son with safely, the ending of the dialogue makes clear the reason why we never return to this question. The philosopher will replace the sophist as "educator" of the youth on the request of both the boy and his father.

[122d9-123b2] – The Introduction Of Theages

For the moment, however, Demodocus agrees to Socrates' modification of procedure, but still probably supposing that the youth's desire "to become wise" will only be satisfied by his placing him with one of the sophists. And that Socrates' interrogation of the boy may throw some light on *which* of the sophists to place him with.

The father agreeing, Socrates may now turn to the youth himself. He does not know him, for Demodocus must introduce them. Socrates expects the youth's

name will be noble (or beautiful – καλος), and this expectation is not disappointed (122e1). This is one of a few conspicuous mentions in the dialogue of a concern with names. Socrates cannot say in the presence of Demodocus that he finds the youth himself beautiful, as he says about other promising youths in other dialogues.[15] Thus he may indicate his attraction to Theages by simply commenting here on his name. However this may be, Socrates does know something about Theages from Demodocus' explanation of his concerns and of the trouble he is having with his son. Socrates, though, may understand Theages' desire differently from Demodocus.

Socrates nonetheless has Theages affirm what he desires and what he expects from his father, i.e., to find someone to place him with. Socrates then asks: which of two do you call the wise, those who know or those who do not? Theages, not surprisingly, says it is those who know. Theages' answer is in keeping with a common sense understanding of who are the wise; it may seem ridiculous to both Theages and Demodocus that Socrates even asks this question. The wise are such, presumably, by virtue of knowing things. In fact, the wise must know more than just any thing; they must know important things. Theages' conception of wisdom, indeed most people's conception, is that the wise are those who appear to know something important, and who admit as much. Thus, Socrates can pose this question quite certain it will elicit the expected answer. Yet we may want to pause here. Socrates is famous for claiming that he knows nothing. But most of his fellow Athenians disregard this claim as ironic, meaning insincere. The irony that Socrates has since become famous for using, however,

has two sides. An ironic statement in the Socratic sense is true somehow, even if this truth is concealed from most who hear it. Socrates also has a reputation for being wise; indeed, many consider him to be genuinely wise, whereas many others dismiss him as only being clever at argument. How then is he wise, but nevertheless can claim to know nothing, as Plato has him do in his *Apology of Socrates* (21d3-9).

In the *Theages*, also, Socrates refers to his ignorance, but admits to knowing "a certain small learnable" (μαθηματος).[16] He claims to have knowledge of erotic things (των ερωτικων)(128b3-5). His knowledge of erotic things is a qualification on his claim to know nothing. And we might notice that, in questioning Theages, Socrates focuses on the desire and not on the question of to whom to send the youth. In doing this, he helps Theages to articulate his own desire, which serves the purpose of revealing what is behind the youth's desire. But because *eros* is a theme in the dialogue, we must consider Socrates' own *eros* as well. Since Socrates claims to know erotic things, we want to consider how the dialogue displays his knowledge or wisdom of erotic things.

Socrates next asks Theages if he has not been taught and educated in the things befitting a gentleman, "such as letters, cithara playing, and wrestling, and other kinds of contest" (122e10-13). Theages agrees that he has been taught these things. Therefore, Theages does know something, but evidently he does not regard it as the "wisdom" that he desires. Thus, Socrates asks if there is still some "knowledge" (επιστημη) that Theages feels he is lacking. Theages agrees that this is the case. So Socrates explicitly asks, "What is this?" But Theages cannot

answer that he desires simply "to become wise". This answer is now inappropriate given the direction the argument has taken, and Theages may now realize this. Socrates is asking him what knowledge he lacks and Theages must see that he needs to answer by naming something like, but other than, the subjects Socrates has just enumerated, which would also count as "knowledge". The allusion by Socrates to "contests" here seems relevant. For as will soon become evident, one "contest" in the dialogue is between father and son. Theages desires to become wise and wants to be placed with a sophist, but Demodocus believes that this is a risky pursuit. Theages has won this contest, for at the beginning of the dialogue Demodocus admits he has given in to the youth and is now taking him into the city to placed with a sophist. Through Socrates' questioning, however, Theages may see that he is losing ground, for he cannot articulate precisely what he desires to Socrates. One can assume that Theages persuaded his father simply by persisting in expressing his desire to be placed with a sophist. Indeed, Theages' desire to study with a sophist may be a desire to learn how to argue, as his friends who have visited the city now are able to display. That Theages cannot say what he desires is itself evidence of what he desires. Moreover, he may feel that his victory over his father is tenuous and his father may renege on his resolve to place him with someone, only increasing his frustration.

Socrates having obliged Theages to do what he is unable to do: to give a substantial answer to what knowledge he lacks but desires, the youth rebels. Theages becomes angry because frustrated by his inability to say *what* it is that he wants to know. We may suspect that he does not actually know what this is.

Therefore instead of answering, he shifts the burden of saying what he desires back onto his father. Ironically, Theages says that his father knows what he desires because he has often told him. Why then can he not say what it is to Socrates? He may have a sense of it, but he cannot readily articulate it himself. Indeed, we may surmise that he has said nothing more to his father than what Demodocus had reported to Socrates in his account of the trouble with his son: he wants to become "wise" by studying with a "wise one".

Socrates now offers himself to Theages as a witness. If indeed Theages has told his father what he desires beyond what he has said here, neither Socrates nor anyone else was present. Thus Socrates obliges Theages to attempt once more to say what he desires. Socrates has cleverly preempted Theages' tactic of shifting responsibility for articulating his desire onto his father. Socrates wants to hear it from Theages, so that he can serve as a "witness" in the youth's case against his father. Theages follows along with this, if only by not protesting. It is difficult here to know how Theages understands this turn of events. He may realize that the responsibility is on him to say what he desires before he can be placed with a sophist. It also seems possible that Theages may be becoming vaguely aware that he is unsure of what it is he wants. Why does Socrates' tactic of offering to serve as a witness succeed? Theages may feel that Socrates has presented him with a challenge that he must meet, that is, the challenge of arguing his position, something of concern to a youth who is attracted to what the sophists teach. Theages is attracted to arguments, as Demodocus' report made apparent (121d). Socrates, by offering himself as a witness, offers himself as an ally to Theages.

Theages has had to battle with his father, knowing that his father is reluctant to grant his request. But he cannot, or does not want, to cut ties with his father. There is no reason to believe that there is not mutual affection between them. Moreover, he knows that his father is still responsible for him, that he is still tied to his father. But Socrates' offer to Theages of an alliance implies his not being completely allied with Demodocus, that is, with the fathers of the city. Socrates assesses the concerns of Theages differently than does his father – for Demodocus, Theages' present desire is risky, as much of his upbringing has been vexatious. It is not immediately obvious how Socrates responds to these concerns or whether these concerns, those of the fathers or the city, are his concerns. One could hardly say that Socrates sees spending time in discussion with the youths as vexatious. Socrates' *eros* towards the young and beautiful is different than the *eros* of a father for his son, as he doubtless understands.

[123b3-124b5] – What Does Theages Desire?

Socrates now begins gently to test Theages. He emphasizes that Theages has blamed his father for not being willing to place him with someone who will make him wise in the knowledge he claims to desire. But what this knowledge is has not yet been clearly stated, and Socrates thus places the burden on Theages to say what it is, since he has blamed his father for withholding it.

Socrates continues: "Come now, if you were desiring the wisdom by which human beings pilot ships, and I happened to ask you: 'Theages, what wisdom do you lack, that you blame your father because he isn't willing to place

you with those by whom you could become wise?' What would you answer? What would it be?" We note that Socrates has to ask Theages repeatedly for an answer, and finally has to suggest one himself to which Theages can respond with a 'yes' or 'no'. Theages agrees that the piloting art is the "wisdom" by which human beings pilot ships. Next, Socrates asks were Theages to desire the wisdom by which they pilot chariots, and blamed his father, what would this wisdom be? Once again, Theages merely agrees to Socrates' suggestion that it is the charioteer's art. After setting up this pair of examples as a 'model', Socrates is now prepared to ask Theages if the thing he is desiring "is something nameless or does it have a name?" Notice Socrates does not pose this question in terms of its being some specific kind of wisdom. Theages' somewhat ambiguous response, "I for one suppose it does have [a name]", suggests that he is unsure about this question. That Socrates asked this question may signal to Theages that he is missing something here. He does not answer definitively that it has a name. Socrates now asks if Theages knows of it, that which he is desiring, but not the name? or also the name? Socrates continues to press him, and again Theages stalls in answering. Socrates persists: "So what is it? Speak!" Theages responds that the name would have to be "wisdom". Theages has not used Socrates' examples to formulate an answer. Socrates now asks, given Theages' unfruitful response, if charioteering is also wisdom. We should notice the shift from the art to the activity. Socrates signals the transition from simply knowing, to being able to do something as the result of knowing. Socrates continues, "Or does it seem to you to be ignorance?" Theages answers, "Not to me." Socrates: "But wisdom?" Theages:

"Yes." Thus Socrates has Theages agree that charioteering is not ignorance, implying it must be wisdom. This comical conclusion results from Socrates' play on a specious dichotomy of 'wisdom-ignorance'. Nevertheless, although Socrates' question does not preclude another answer, the form of the question leads to Theages' assent. We note that the Greek word for ignorance is αμαθια, literally, "lack of learning". Charioteering may therefore be a type of learning, without necessarily being "wisdom".

Socrates now asks what charioteering is used for. Is it that by which we know how to rule a team of horses? Theages assents. Socrates then asks if the piloting art is wisdom. Theages agrees again, but with less certainty; it seems so to him. Socrates now asks if the piloting art is "that by which we have knowledge of how to rule ships?" Theages answers emphatically that this is what the piloting art is. Theages is interested by this conclusion, as he may realize that the rule of ships is in part the rule of men. Socrates now once again asks Theages the question which introduced this series of questions (123b3-4): "what is the wisdom which you desire?" But he adds, most suggestively: "that by which we have knowledge of how to rule what?" Theages answers Socrates that he desires knowledge of how to rule human beings. This is the first instance in the dialogue of Theages substantially responding to one of Socrates' questions. With the question of rule, Socrates has made progress in discovering or revealing the wisdom that Theages desires.

Theages' answer requires examination, though, as Socrates now asks which human beings it is that Theages desires the knowledge of how to rule.

Socrates asks whether it is the sick that Theages wants to rule. The youth emphatically responds that these are not the ones – "No indeed!" Socrates suggests that it is the medical art by which one rules these. Theages agrees. He further agrees that singers in a chorus are ruled by the musical art, and that those who exercise are ruled by the gymnastic art. Theages confirms that he is not interested in a specific art that rules some specific group in a limited respect. Therefore, Socrates now asks: "of those who are doing what?" Socrates emphasizes that Theages should model his response on what has preceded, exhorting him to make "a spirited endeavor". Does Socrates believe that Theages has not been making such an attempt thus far: or is he, rather, appealing to his competitive nature? We should note that Socrates is attempting to get Theages to say more about his desire at each stage of the examination.

Theages will now answer that it seems to him that those in the city (πολις) are those he desires the knowledge to rule. Socrates playfully asks if the sick are not also in the city, eliciting from Theages that he is speaking of all in the city, not any one particular group.

Socrates now asks for clarification about the "art" (τεχνη) that he is speaking of. Socrates suggests, and Theages affirms, that while both the farming art and the art of carpentry rule over those who participate in these activities, neither of these are the art Theages means. But all these arts are in the city, or are a part of the city. Thus Socrates implicitly suggests some still more comprehensive art of rule (124a5-6). But he does not openly name it, and we will see shortly the effect of this. For the moment, this superior or comprehensive art

of "ruling" all subordinate arts is left ambiguous. Socrates speaks instead of "knowledge of how to rule all of these as well as the farmers, and the builders, and all the craftsmen, and the private individuals, both men and women." Theages now affirms that this is what he has for a long time wanted to say. But one is justified in asking whether this is so. Or, rather, has Theages just now become explicitly aware of a previously unformulated desire underlying the desire about which he has been troubling his father?

[124c1-125b4] – Theages As Tyrant

Socrates now continues by asking Theages about specific examples of men who may have ruled over the same people that Theages admits desiring the "wisdom" to rule over. Perhaps, then, these men could offer an alternative to the sophists. The sequence of examples Socrates cites – Aegisthus, Peleus, Periander, Archelaus, and Hippias – are all men who have actually ruled. This contrasts with the sophists who promise to teach the young men how to persuade others, though they themselves remain 'mere' teachers. But we cannot suppose that Theages necessarily understood their "wisdom" as the way to ruling. Theages is attracted by the sophists because his companions have been able to display sophistical skills, i.e., they have been able to win arguments. It is this skill which Theages desires and has named "wisdom", presuming that the ability to win arguments proves one is "wise". Only in his discussion here with Socrates, and by Socrates' probing, has the youth come to see the connection between "wisdom" and rule, or that the wisdom which he desires is a manifestation of his desire for ruling over

other human beings. But Socrates' argument, leading to the conclusion that this is necessarily the tyrannical art, is faulty. Socrates has provided Theages a suggestive selection of men whom Theages agrees ruled over certain political aggregations of people, and that these men were called "tyrants". Therefore, if Theages wants to rule people in a similar way, he desires to exercise tyrannical rule.

While the examples Socrates cites may subtly suggest a relationship between the desire for wisdom and the desire for rule, they obviously point more specifically to tyranny as the object of Theages' desire. Socrates could have used other political or "statesman-like" examples to reach directly the very conclusion Theages later affirms (cf. 126a10-13). With an indignation of questionable authenticity, Socrates at once chastises Theages for desiring to tyrannize over "us", and at the same time absurdly shames Demodocus for not sending Theages to "some school for tyrants" whereby to become "a craftsman in the wisdom which he [Theages] desires" (125a3-7). Demodocus is noticeably shocked. He had no notion that his son's desire was for rule, much less for tyrannical rule. And doubtless Socrates is perfectly aware that Demodocus did not, nor could he, know this underlying desire of Theages. Nor could Demodocus have revealed what Socrates just has. The ridiculousness of Socrates' 'blaming' of Demodocus for not sending Theages to "some school for tyrants" may have, though, a more serious consideration. For one must consider whether the skills the sophist teach young men do not foster this tyrannical inclination, and that this is part of the city's fear of them.[17] Socrates having suggestively led Theages to agree that behind his

desire "to become wise" is the desire for tyrannical rule over all human beings, Theages does not disown this conclusion. Theages does not protest Socrates equating these desires.

Socrates then does not seem to side wholly with a view that learning tyrannical wisdom is unqualifiedly bad. His (mock) chastisement of Theages' desire to tyrannize is offset by his (mock) shaming of Demodocus for holding his son back. His criticism cannot be that Demodocus was unwilling to send him to a school for tyrants, since Theages' desire has only now come to light. Therefore, Socrates now asks Demodocus "shall we in common, I and you, deliberate about whom we should send him to and by means of whose company he might become a wise tyrant?" (125a8-9). Why does Socrates appeal to Demodocus here? Socrates may be concerned at this point that Demodocus, who has become agitated, if not angry at what has come to light, would interrupt, possibly ending the inquiry altogether. Therefore Socrates preempts this possibility by now allying himself with the father for the sake, ostensibly, of considering *to whom* they should send the youth, tacitly confirming that this was Demodocus' original concern – not what knowledge or "wisdom" Theages desired. Unfortunately for Demodocus, what has now come to light has only heightened his fear about the prospect of committing Theages to the care of someone for the sake of his learning "tyrannical wisdom".

Demodocus agrees that further deliberation is necessary: "Yes, by Zeus, Socrates! Let us deliberate indeed, since to me it certainly seems that this matter requires no ordinary deliberation!" (125b1-2). But Socrates, by seemingly turning

to the question of who could make Theages "a wise tyrant", actually turns the inquiry onto the question of what the tyrant's "wisdom" entails. The question of whom to send Theages to is again very subtly dropped by Socrates. To find he who teaches the tyrant, one must first know *what* the tyrant is actually wise in. This should seem strange because, based on the previous agreements, it would seem that the tyrant's "wisdom" is some knowledge of how to rule over all those in the city. But Socrates does not proceed to this obvious and necessary conclusion. Instead, he cites the authority of the poet Euripides as a possible means to finding the source of the tyrant's "wisdom".

[125b5-126a9] – What Is Tyrannical Wisdom?

Socrates invokes Euripides to investigate what he claims regarding how the tyrants acquire their "wisdom", the wisdom that Theages has now agreed to be desiring. Socrates does not make explicit why he refers at this point to a poet such as Euripides, but it is not likely irrelevant that the poets are tacitly acknowledged as a possible source of knowledge about tyrants. Socrates quotes Euripides saying: "Tyrants are wise through keeping company (συνουσια) with the wise".[18] Socrates now creates a fictional dialogue in which he and Theages interrogate Euripides as to what it is that these wise who keep company with the tyrants are wise *in*. One might expect the question to be *who* are the wise that the tyrant keeps company with. Socrates does not ask this question, though. To elucidate his procedure here, he now asks Theages, who is not given a chance to answer this initial question, what one would answer were "tyrants" replaced by

"farmers". In that case, Socrates suggests, the answer would be "wise in the things of the art of farming", and Theages agrees. The next and central example involves cooks, and here Socrates avoids the term "art" in his question. Is the tyrant's "wisdom" not properly speaking an art? Art is absent because it is what is at issue in this central example. With the example of cooks, we notice that what belongs to cooks is the knowledge of how to prepare foods correctly. But, then, is the end of knowledge in 'correct' cooking what is most pleasurable to the one eating the food, or what is most conducive to good health? In the former case, the cook would be ruled by the taste of the one eating the food, whereas in the latter case by the knowledge of either the doctor or trainer. Socrates emphasizes this with his next example of the wrestlers. Wrestlers train their body for the sake of strength and agility, and who are therefore concerned with the needs of the healthy body. With cooking, then, we must ask for the sake of what or whom is the art being practiced. These examples bear on the consideration of rule and the tyrant, since Socrates did not consider there the end towards which the tyrant's rule is directed (cf. 124e2-8).

Socrates now asks Theages, based on what has preceded, what are the wise wise in, those whom the tyrant keeps company with? Theages admits, with his first oath in the dialogue, that he does not know. Theages need not be utterly perplexed, for based on the pattern of the previous examples, the obvious answer would be that the tyrant is wise in the things of the art of, or in what belongs to, tyranny. Therefore Theages' confusion lies elsewhere. Theages believes that the tyrant is "wise", and that this is proven by the fact that the tyrant has attained a

position superior to those he rules over. Moreover, his ability to rule successfully is an indication of his knowledge. Theages still sees victory as a proof of superiority.

After Theages' admission of not knowing, Socrates offers to tell the youth what the wise are wise in, those whom the tyrant keeps company with. Theages does not insist that Socrates tell him, but leaves this decision up to the philosopher – "If you want to" is Theages' response (125d8). Again, Socrates appeals to a poet: the poet Anacreon declared that the tyrant Callicrite knew "the things of the tyrannic art" (125e2). Both examples of the poets imply that the poet knows about tyrants and what the tyrants know. Hence, the poets must keep company with the tyrants. Therefore, perhaps the tyrants are wise for keeping company with the poets, who (in turn) praise them for their wisdom in doing so; if this is indeed the case, then Euripides' claim would reflect well on the "wisdom" of the poets, even more than that of the tyrants. There is no suggestion that the poets in their wisdom criticize the tyrants for their rule.

Socrates now asks Theages if this art that the poet declares the tyrant knows is what he desires. More specifically, does Theages desire the company of a man (ανδρος) who happens (τυγχανει) to have this art, so that he may tyrannize over "us and the city"? With this question, Socrates elicits a protest from Theages. Though it has perhaps only become fully clear to him now, the youth accuses the philosopher of mocking and joking (or playing – παιζεις) with him, "for a long time". Theages had previously allowed the argument to declare that he wanted to be a tyrant (124e9). But now he seems to recognize that

Socrates has taken the argument to a ridiculous conclusion. Is the mention of Callicrite and her mother Cyane as tyrants what evokes Theages' claim that Socrates is mocking him? If so, what does Theages' objection indicate? It seems that he does not accept the conclusion that these women were tyrants by simply knowing the things of the tyrannic art. That is, he seems to reject the notion of their actually ruling tyrannically merely by having only some "knowledge" of how to do it – specifically by possessing an art of tyrannical rule. Socrates' apparent suggestion that knowledge or wisdom of how to rule is sufficient for having the ability to rule is undermined by Theages' objection. By implication, then, it would seem actual ruling requires something else in addition, above or besides simply knowing how to do it.[19]

Socrates responds to Theages' protest at being mocked by asking him if he did not desire the wisdom to rule over all the "citizens" (πολιτων), and if he assented to this desire, would he not then be a tyrant? Socrates in a manner ignores Theages' protest. His response addresses the protest only by implying that Theages' desire is worthy of mockery. Theages had indeed admitted to such a desire, with the exception that Socrates now speaks of "citizens", whereas before it had been simply "all the human beings in the city" (Compare 124e5-6 with 125d7). Unable to escape this conclusion, Theages alters his admission. He now concedes that he supposes he would "pray" to become a tyrant, but, he further supposes, so would all other human beings, including Socrates. If one could not tyrannize over all human beings, then one would tyrannize over as many as possible. Indeed, he declares, one would even pray to become a god. But, he then

declares "… this is not what I said I *desire*" (126a3-4, emphasis added). This is of course true of his original desire (to be placed with a sophist), but Theages has now gone back on the argument, denying that it has actually revealed his "desire". But does his own admission here of what he would "pray" for not reveal that the argument *is* correct, and that Socrates has helped him reveal what his desire for "wisdom" actually is? What Theages' earlier admission suggests is that his deepest desire is to exercise tyrannical rule, or even god-like power. In fact, all desires, on Theages' view, would be tyrannical since whatever they are striving after would be at the expense of other human beings, for one's own benefit. But, he is now tacitly claiming, his desire to be placed with a sophist is not for this purpose; his wanting to win arguments against his companions is not for the sake of exercising tyrannical power, but of political power.

Socrates is silent here, ignoring Theages' claim regarding the desire of all human beings for tyranny, only addressing his last claim that this is not what he desires. Might Socrates' silence suggest possible agreement with this claim? Surely Socrates could not admit in the presence of this youth's father that he agrees, even if he and Demodocus believed this to be true. But if Socrates did not agree, would we not expect him to attempt to refute or at least test Theages' claim? We recall that Theages was chastised for admitting to the desire for tyranny, but here Socrates fails to react in this manner. Socrates, then, asks Theages: "But whatever is it that you do desire? Did you not assent that you desire to rule over the citizens?" (126a5-6). This second mention of "citizens" by Socrates has the effect on Theages, not of leading him to denying his desire to

rule, but rather, of leading him to a more moderate and reputable version of it. Not only does Theages now claim that he does not want to rule with violence, which he believes the tyrants do, but he also expects the ruled willingly to submit to being ruled. He believes he sees men who rule thus and they are held "in good repute" (126a8-9). Theages thus seems to understand the tyrant as the one who rules by force over other human beings who, if they were able, would do the same.

Socrates now suggests to him examples of past rulers of Athens who are not considered tyrants, but are instead held in good repute among men, not all of whom seem to be vying for political rule. Thus we may want to consider together, as Theages has not, his claims that, on the one hand, human beings strive after the position of the tyrant and, on the other hand, submit to being ruled and even do so willingly. Could this occur in the same human being at different times? Does this bear on the trajectory of the *Theages* as a whole, from rebellious Theages to Theages willingly submitting to the philosopher's rule? Be this as it may, Socrates asks whether Theages is considering Themistocles, Pericles, and Cimon as the men he wishes to rule in the manner of, men who have become clever (or terrible, δεινος)[20] in "the things of the art of politics" (τα πολιτικα). Theages declares emphatically, with his second oath of the dialogue, that these are the rulers he meant when he spoke of those held in good repute and who rule over those who are willing. Socrates has successfully led Theages to confront the possibility of being a tyrant, but the youth rejects this possibility in favour of being a ruler who is honoured. More importantly, Socrates has drawn Theages away from the

possibility of studying with anyone who could be seen to teach tyranny, if this was a real possibility. Socrates will now turn to the second possible source of knowledge of how to rule, namely, men who have actually ruled – the political men, or those δεινος in "the art of politics".

[126a10- 128c9] – Questions Of The Political Men, Theages' Revolt And Socrates' Response

Socrates now establishes through another set of examples that the one who is wise in what pertains to a particular art is the "clever" *practitioner* of that art, and that Theages should study with these.

Socrates asks Theages if to become a "clever" horseman, would anyone go to anyone other than one versed in "the art of horsemanship"? Theages again emphatically agrees, swearing by Zeus in his third and central of five oaths in the dialogue.[21] Theages may already notice at this point that the implication of Socrates' first example points to a "clever" political man versed in the art of politics as the teacher Theages needs.

With the turn to the political men, those δεινος in the things of the art of politics, Socrates turns back to his 'criticism' of Demodocus, at least in theme. There are, it seems, political "craftsmen" that Theages could have been sent to. This is the implication of the argument from Socrates' questions addressed to Theages, as to who one would go to, to become wise in the art of something. Obviously it would be the one versed in that art, as proven in practice. But Socrates is careful in setting up this argument; he does not quite say that

Themistocles, Pericles, and Cimon are "clever" in the art of politics, but only in *the things pertaining to* the art of politics. What they know, it seems, may not itself constitute the art of politics, whatever that art (if it indeed exists) may entail – although surely these men practice politics and are amongst the most successful exemplars. Thus, the "art of politics" may not be simply reducible to rational principles which one can learn, know, and follow, thus being considered a "knower" of that art. Socrates' switch from "wisdom" to "cleverness" indicates something other than a strict knowledge. We may also note here that "wisdom" has a derogatory sense to it, as in our expression "a wise guy", meaning someone who is "clever", particularly clever at using speech in an way to tease or get the better of another. This consideration reminds one that the sophists are literally the "wise ones", and hence may be clever as well as the political men, although obviously not necessarily in the same manner. The sophists, curiously, claim to teach politics but do not themselves practice it, whereas the political men do not teach politics – nor do they claim to be able or offer to attempt such teaching – but themselves are practitioners.

Theages undoubtedly does not notice this subtle indication by Socrates. Rather, he must draw the impression, as his emphatic oath attests, that these men possess "the art of politics", and that it is this art that he wants to learn. Thus when Socrates asks him whether anyone would learn the art of horsemanship from anyone besides those versed in the art, Theages again answers emphatically with another oath. He is now persuaded that the "wisdom" he desires is an art, and that it is attainable from the one who is well-versed in the *practice* of that art.

This, we should note, rules out the sophists. Socrates now asks Theages if the one "clever" in the art of horsemanship would be any other than those "who own horses, and who use them all the time – both their own and many belonging to others?" (126b8-9). "Obviously" it is these, Theages declares. The strangeness of this claim involving "ownership" as well as "use" does not fully reveal itself until his next example, that of javelin throwing – the one "wise" in the art of javelin throwing has and uses javelins, both his own and others. Socrates is silent on the "cleverness" of the one practicing the javelin throwing art; rather, one can become "wise" in the things that pertain to *this* art. Socrates' use of "wise" has a double meaning here – one would become "wise" by going to those who appear to know the art one is seeking and, moreover, one would have to be "wise" in some sense to recognize the one who possesses knowledge of an art. Socrates now asks, drawing the implications from these examples, whether Theages will become "wise" in the things of the art of politics by resorting to any others but those "clever in the things that pertain to the art of politics and who all the time use their own city and many others?" (126c7-8).

Why does Socrates emphasize "ownership" in his examples? With the central example of javelin throwing, the only "art" that Socrates claims here one can be "wise" in, the matter of ownership seems especially irrelevant. The art of javelin throwing would be the principles one is taught in regard to throwing the javelin, presumably in a contest. But with this example and that of horsemanship, we are reminded of another "contest" – war. In war one may well use what belongs to others for the sake of victory; one may use the horses and weapons of

the enemy against them. Thus the question of use, as with the ability to use a javelin, is only the 'technical' consideration here. More importantly, though, is the ability to use something for the sake of one's own advantage. The art of politics may be, then, more properly the ability to use that which belongs to others for one's own or the city's advantage. And the ability or "cleverness" to gain this advantage may be more reliant on wisdom or prudence, more akin to these, than it is to the knowledge one gains from simply learning an art. To that extent, an "art of politics" would not be analogous to an art like javelin throwing.

We will anticipate Theages' rejection that it is the political men from whom one can learn the "art of politics" and return to what he claims regarding this in a moment. In order to understand Socrates' strange inclusion of "ownership" in his horsemanship and javelin throwing examples the first consideration is that the sophists claim to teach something like an "art of politics", but (as noted above) they are not practitioners of politics, unlike the political men Socrates enumerated previously. This fact raises the question of why the sophists do not participate in politics? Do their actions not furnish at least a partial answer here? The knowledge or wisdom the sophists profess to teach is of questionable adequacy to making one "clever" in politics, since they themselves seem lacking in something required to be practitioners of this "art". Thus one is not "wise" by going to someone who professes to teach such an art, but whose expertise is not proven in practice.

For if an art of politics is possible, it must be universal as an art of javelin throwing would be – its principles would not be affected by the laws of men, but

only by the "laws" of nature (e.g. gravity, aerodynamics, etc.). In returning to Socrates' examples of political men, we notice important differences amongst them. Could Pericles have been a great statesman in any polity? Themistocles, as we know achieved political success in other polities besides Athens. And this consideration reminds us of a fourth man, *the* political man who had success in both Athens and Sparta and was courted in Persia: Alcibiades. Alcibiades is the one "carrying on business with both Greek and barbarian cities". Thus his "cleverness" seems to lie in his ability for this going-between; he "uses" cities for his own sake, for his own tasks. The difference then between the ones who claim to teach an art of politics (the sophists) and those who appear to possess such an art (Alcibiades) is implicit in the fact that neither Alcibiades nor the sophists as foreigners would be allowed by law to practice politics in a foreign polity. Generally speaking, one can only rise to political prominence in one's 'own' polity. Yet Alcibiades is able to do so and the sophists are not. Alcibiades is able to affect the laws of other polities in a way the foreign sophists in Athens are unable – he is able to adapt the city to him, whereas the sophists are parasitic on the city. They hold out the promise of an art of politics to the young men of the city such as Theages. This promise is premised on the notion, which Socrates here seems to be testing Theages' responsiveness to, that such an art exists and that it can be known as the other arts, as clearly some kind of knowledge. The sophists teach, in particular, persuasive speech as the one thing necessary to gain political power – as if such cleverness in speaking were all-powerful. They fail to recognize the psychological concern of many men in the city, men like

Demodocus who, regardless of the most persuasive speech (and indeed likely due in part to such speech), do not trust the sophists, partly because they are not his fellow citizens. They do not trust clever speakers, much less clever-speaking foreigners. This is an "erotic" concern, Demodocus' love of what is his own – his own city, his own son – and the sophists do not fully appreciate this concern in their belief in the primacy of political rhetoric.

Theages responds to the suggestion that he should spend time with the practicing politicians by recounting a speech of Socrates he has heard from others that the sons of men (ανδρος) versed in the political art, the practicing politicians, are often no better (with respect to the political art, presumably) than the sons of other craftsmen. Theages has tested this claim against his own observations and believes, from what he has "perceived", that this is indeed "most true" (αληθεστατα –126d1-5). Thus Theages does not simply agree with the conclusion implied in Socrates' line of argument regarding the "wisdom" of learning from proven practitioners. What draws Theages away from accepting the analogical conclusion of the argument? Does something in the argument remind Theages of what others have reported of Socrates' argument on a different occasion? In any case, Theages has recalled this report of Socrates' argument, and now resists the conclusion he had a moment ago emphatically agreed to – that the proven practitioners versed in the things pertaining to an art would be those to make oneself a "clever" practitioner of the art (as in the cases of horsemanship and javelin throwing). Theages goes on to say that he does not believe these political men will benefit him and, moreover, that they may not be able to benefit

any human beings at all. Socrates seems to test Theages here. Although by the analogy Theages should reach the conclusion that the political men are the ones that he should seek, since they alone are proven practitioners of an "art of politics", there are grounds for doubting this conclusion. The political men, being occupied with the business of the city, may, therefore, neglect the care of their sons.[22] Does the beginning of this dialogue not partly attest to this fact? Although Demodocus is clearly fearful and anxious about his son, and (as we will soon learn) has political experience himself, he does not indicate that he is competent to teach an "art of politics" to his son, now that this has ostensibly been revealed as Theages' desire. It is doubtful whether Theages would be receptive to learning from his father whatever the case. Nevertheless, Demodocus has to deal with the fact that Theages already had the sophists in mind.[23]

In any case, Theages questions whether these political men would benefit him and not their own sons; moreover, he suspects they may not be able to benefit any human beings at all. Demodocus will later be praised by Socrates as held in "high esteem" by the city for his political involvement (127e1-5). Thus Theages' criticism of the political men may be an implicit criticism of his father, whether or not he realizes it at this point. Theages' second claim, that the political men may not be able to benefit anyone regarding the things they practice, raises the question as to why this might be the case. This claim seriously calls into question the possibility of a teachable "art of politics", as Socrates was apparently endorsing. Still, we should note that Theages' claim here may in fact indicate

more about the natures of the sons of even the greatest men, than it does about the abilities of these men.

Socrates' response, however, ignores what Theages has suggested (a tactic he had employed previously; cf. 126a5-6). That is, he does not address Theages' use of his own argument – which is Theages' most promising contribution to the dialogue thus far. Instead, he now asks Theages how he would respond to a son like himself if he were the father, given that Theages has now declared that he is unwilling to spend time with those whom he himself acknowledges to be the skilled practitioners of what he declares he wishes to learn. Socrates uses the example of a son who desires to become a "good painter", but who refuses to study with the painters. And similarly in the case of the aulists and the citharists. Would Theages know, Socrates asks, what to do if he had a son who wanted to be one of these craftsmen, yet who refused to study with the craftsmen in these arts? Theages responds emphatically with another oath that he would not know what to do. But Socrates' examples here introduce more clearly what was missing from the previous agreement regarding the political practitioners as teachers. The examples of painting and music point to a consideration that argument had been silent on, but was implicit in Theages' claim about the sons of political men – that it may require 'talent' or some other qualities for success in politics. Socrates may subtly indicate this by speaking of the "good" (αγαθος), not the "wise", painter. The good painter can paint well; he does not only know the principles of how to paint. The ability to learn the art well by experience and to learn it more easily than others, is implicit in what we refer to as 'talent'. Socrates' switch from

"wise" to "good", then, may be suggest that wisdom or cleverness is something beyond whatever one can learn from an art, and that certain arts may cultivate analogous skills useful for politics, but are not themselves this "art". Themistocles had his son taught to ride a horse and throw a javelin, but he did not become a great statesman; Pericles himself was taught music and natural philosophy by those his father placed him with.[24]

With Theages' admission of not knowing what he earlier expected his father to know, Socrates asks Theages if he can blame his father for being at a loss (i.e. "perplexed" - απορει) as what to do with him. Socrates assures Theages that they will place him with any "Athenian gentleman"[25] he wishes who is "versed in the things that pertain to the political art" (127a5). This will have the double benefit, Socrates claims, of giving Theages a better reputation with "the many", and of not spending any money. Socrates here is clearly still alluding indirectly to the sophists as the alternative to where to send Theages – it is the sophists who charge large amounts of money, and from whom one who studies with them could acquire a questionable reputation, given their being foreigners and of suspiciously 'cosmopolitan' views. This tacit criticism of the sophists as suitable teachers may be primarily intended, then, to gratify Demodocus – it addresses his concerns of money and corruption. Socrates seems here to be speaking more to Demodocus than to Theages.

Having been offered the opportunity to be placed with any Athenian gentleman he wishes, Theages promptly asks Socrates whether he is not one of the gentlemen that he has just referred to. Presumably Theages intends the

question rhetorically, for he immediately declares that if Socrates is willing to keep company with him, he will seek no one else. Theages has dropped the qualification "versed in the art of politics" (127a10-12).

Socrates responds to Theages' proposal by asking: "What is this you are saying, Theages?" This response by Socrates has a couple of effects.[26] First, it would force Theages to have to give a better account of what he is proposing. Second, it allows Demodocus to have the opportunity to react to his son's proposal. For it is to Socrates' benefit in dealing with this delicate situation, whether he is interested in Theages or not, to learn first how the father regards the proposal before himself answering Theages as to what he thinks of it. Socrates would not want to respond in a manner that would unnecessarily offend Demodocus. We can now say with more certainty that Socrates' previous proposal was meant to appeal to Demodocus, as it addressed in particular his concerns – whether his son was to go to a foreigner or an Athenian citizen, how much money he was to spend, (given that money is still *somewhat* of a concern for Demodocus; cf. 121d7-122a1), and the reputation his son and family would maintain or acquire. Therefore, Socrates may have been attempting to draw him into the discussion.

However this may be, Theages' proposal certainly does draw Demodocus back into the conversation and clearly on the side of his son. He does not merely approve of the proposal, but exhorts Socrates to comply with his son's request, since it would especially "gratify" him: "Indeed, I am even ashamed to say how intensely I wish it! But I beseech both of you – you to be willing to keep company

with this boy and you not to seek to have intercourse with anyone except Socrates. And you will relieve me of many fearful thoughts. For now I am very fearful on his account, lest he fall in with someone else such as will corrupt this youth" (127b5-c4). We can now observe how fearful Demodocus was of the possibility of placing Theages with a sophist. Thus Socrates' proposal that the boy be placed with an Athenian gentleman, but particularly Theages' manner of acceptance, is a relief of Demodocus' greatest fear. But why has Theages so readily and emphatically singled out Socrates as the one he wants to spend time with? And while Demodocus must have gained some more substantial impression of the philosopher from what has transpired in this discussion, it is now clear that Demodocus' familiarity with Socrates' way of life must be rather limited; he apparently is unaware that Socrates spends much of his leisure with young people like Theages. We can easily understand his enthusiasm for Theages' proposal – he is fearful that if Socrates refuses to spend time with the youth, he may fall in with other company of a less than salutary influence. Thus Demodocus closes his speech with a frank admission of his fear for his son possibly being corrupted and the alleviation of fear that he would feel if Socrates were willing to keep company with Theages. Moreover, we may suspect that Demodocus' fear had not been reduced, but had actually been intensified by his son's surprising admissions (cf. 125b1). Theages now responds to this, the primary concern of his father: his father need not fear if Demodocus can persuade Socrates to accept Theages into his company. Thus, Socrates was responsible for intensifying the father's fear, while leaving the son with no clear alternative for who he can spend time with for

the sake of learning the art of rule. Regardless of the chance character of this discussion, we must not underestimate the fact that, given the opportunity, Demodocus chose to seek counsel from the philosopher.

Demodocus now attempts to persuade Socrates of this proposal. He declares Theages to have spoken "very nobly". Father and son are now in perfect agreement as to what is to be done with the youth. This obviously contrasts strikingly with the beginning of the dialogue where the father and son are clearly at odds over Theages' insistent desire and Demodocus' reluctance to accede to it (cf. 123a4-8). We now hear for the first time what Socrates thinks of this proposal. Socrates appears to resist their request, offering a number of reasons. It is difficult to say for certain what Socrates' understanding of Theages' 'nature' is at this shift in the dialogue; this is a consideration now, since 'nature' or 'talent' was implicit in the discussion of the sons of the political men. What we may say is that Socrates' *daimonion* did not resist this conversation at the beginning with Demodocus; moreover, it was by Socrates' suggestion that the discussion moved to a consideration of what the youth desired, resulting in Theages becoming Socrates' main interlocutor. Socrates has used many suggestive 'questions' throughout the dialogue, leading Theages to his present understanding. Thus, we must regard with some skepticism the objections Socrates puts forward to the proposal.

Socrates begins his response by claiming that he does not wonder about Demodocus' concern with his own son, specifically that he become the best possible. Socrates seems to understand the concern of a father for his son, the *eros*

of the paternal relationship. Demodocus, for his part, would understand Socrates' concern for Theages as the obligation of a gentleman-citizen aiding another with the upbringing of his son. Given the possibility which Socrates presented to Theages regarding to whom to send him – that they will place the youth with an Athenian gentleman – Demodocus obviously prefers this proposal, specifically with Socrates as the Athenian gentleman (cf. 127a1-7). Socrates, however, claims to be in wonder as to where Demodocus came by the notion that he, rather than Demodocus, would be able to benefit Theages with a view to his becoming "a good citizen". That *this* is the goal of finding Theages someone to spend time with was never previously stated, but it would certainly appeal to Demodocus. Socrates may then divide the concern of the father and of the youth, by now claiming that he also wonders where Theages came by the opinion that Socrates would "benefit" him. Demodocus' foremost concern, Socrates implies, is that his son become a good citizen, or not be corrupted by whatever he receives to supplement his traditional education. Socrates uses the notion of the "good citizen" to appeal to Demodocus, who we now learn is held in "high esteem" as a citizen, politely claiming that he would be no better at bestowing *this* benefit than Demodocus. Surely Socrates' praise has a gratifying effect on Demodocus and may enhance Theages' impression of his father. But since neither father nor son are interested in this alternative, it aids in reinforcing the new agreement between them, while also possibly implying that the father-son relationship may have pedagogic shortcomings. The father is concerned with his son being the best possible and Socrates understands this "erotic" concern. But this itself may be a

hindrance to a father recognizing the "nature" of his son and tailoring his expectations accordingly. However this may be, Socrates also contrasts the benefit Demodocus wants for his son with whatever benefit Theages sees Socrates as being able to bestow. However, the fact that Theages agreed in a manner to desiring the "art of politics", does not necessarily imply that he believes Socrates, more than others, can help him acquire this art or at least some of its skills. We must recall Theages' original desire. Whether or not he believes that Socrates is able to teach the political art better than the political men – of which, as Theages doubtless knows, Socrates is not one – is it not Socrates' superiority at arguments that Theages must now want to learn from spending time with the philosopher? Has Theages now not experienced the speeches of Socrates that he had only heard about from his companions? Certainly the dialogue has displayed at least this superiority in speech to young Theages, but not any 'political skills' on Socrates' part.

Socrates can now proceed with his objections to the proposal, qualified by the consideration of Theages becoming "a good citizen". Socrates notes that he, unlike Theages' father, has not held "great offices" and by implication is not held in "high esteem" by many other people. Socrates does not say anything about knowing less than Demodocus. Instead, he continues, if Theages looks down on the political men – presumably as teachers of their political skills, although this is not made explicit – Theages then may go to one of those "who proclaim themselves capable of educating young human beings" (127e7-8). Theages having already declared his preference for Socrates, the sophists are re-introduced here as

a possible source of Theages' education, some even mentioned by name. But Socrates' endorsement of the sophists has to be seen in light of how he frames it. The sophists are "so wise" that they "persuade the most well-born and richest among the young" to spend time with them along with spending a great deal of money, despite the fact that these youths could spend time for free with one of the citizens (128a1-6). The sophists claim, not to make good citizens, but to be able to educate young human beings. While this may not preclude their students becoming "good citizens", Socrates emphasis on their being foreigners (in the manner in which he lists their names) it may be doubtful whether Athenian citizenship is their primary concern.[27]

The political men, on the other hand, make no claim as educators and, moreover, may not be able to bestow the beneficial things that they themselves are renowned for. Theages and his kin are therefore left with either the sophists, who thus naturally recommend themselves, or Socrates, who will profess here and elsewhere to know nothing or almost nothing. Again here, as noted previously, Socrates does not condemn the sophists for what they teach or suggest that they corrupt those who spend time with them – only Demodocus suggested corruption as a possible result of the sophists' education.[28] But Socrates certainly plays off of Demodocus' fear, and we must notice that Socrates addresses this speech specifically to Demodocus. Does Socrates' appeal to the sophists, knowing that Demodocus fears their corrupting influence, not actually aid in recommending himself as a alternative for Theages, instead of achieving the effect this speech is

ostensibly intended for – namely, to dissuade father and son from considering Socrates as someone who may benefit Theages?

Socrates also proclaims that he wishes he knew "these blessed and noble learnables" that the sophists claim to teach (128b4). Thus Socrates does not recommend himself, since here, just as in other Platonic dialogues, he does not claim to be able to educate others and, moreover, claims to be himself in need of education. Socrates' most substantial reason, then, for not being able to benefit Theages is that he does not know anything "except a certain small learnable (μαθηματος): what pertains to the erotic things (των ερωτικων). As regards this learnable, to be sure, I rank myself as clever (δεινος) beyond anyone, whether human beings of the past or of the present" (128b3-7).

[128b8-131a11] – The Philosopher As Educator: Socrates' Account Of His *Daimonion*

Theages, now appealing to his father as witness and ally, declares that he believes Socrates is still not willing to spend some time with him, but is instead merely jesting with them. Certainly Socrates' claim to be "clever" beyond any human being in the "erotic things" is not readily intelligible to Theages, nor is it immediately intelligible simply. Be this as it may, Theages emphatically reaffirms his willingness to consort with Socrates. This is significant, as Socrates has apparently brought new reasons to bear against the proposal or request of father and son. Theages completely disregards Socrates' ironic claim of being unsuitable due to his ignorance, as he now clearly wants to spend time with Socrates.

Socrates' suggestion of the sophists as an alternative has not dissuaded Theages or rekindled his desire for their company. Quite the contrary; it seems to have made him only more determined for Socrates' company. Theages now gives the reason for his choice: "I know boys of my age and a little older who before they kept company with him were of no account but since they started to frequent this one in a very brief time showed themselves superior to all those to whom they were previously inferior" (128b8-c6). It is now clear from this claim that some of Theages' companions of whom Demodocus spoke earlier in the dialogue, the ones Theages envies, have spent some time with Socrates, whether exclusively or with sophists also. They may have heard sophists engaged with Socrates. However these other boys learned what they did, according to Theages they have displayed a noticeable superiority in their abilities. Theages may now realize that if political "wisdom" cannot be taught by the political men, his original desire to argue persuasively may have some benefit, as the boys he knows clearly display *some* kind of superiority. It is difficult to say when Theages came upon the notion of spending time with Socrates, but as suggested previously, it could be due *in part* to the argument reaching an impasse as to the question of whom he should or could spend time with. But we do not want to neglect the possibility that Socrates, although claiming not to know anything, has clearly displayed in the course of their conversation – the action of the dialogue – a "wisdom" that may have now become apparent to Theages. Surely Theages has learnt much about his own desire from Socrates' inquiry.

Theages has implied here that Socrates is responsible for this superiority displayed by those who spend time with him. Thus, Socrates directly asks him if he knows what this is. Theages now explicitly declares, emphatically with an oath, that if Socrates wishes (βουλη), Theages will also acquire this superiority. Socrates responds by flatly denying that this is the case. Since Theages has now directly confronted Socrates with the question of his ability to benefit youths (Theages and others), Socrates offers to explain to Theages "what sort of thing this is" – presumably what accounts for the superiority these other boys have acquired. He claims it has escaped Theages' notice – it is not immediately clear how Socrates intends this claim. What he subsequently will say could not have been 'noticed' by anyone.

Socrates now begins his explanation of what it is that accounts for the progress of the boys that Theages has referred to. That this is ostensible purpose of Socrates' long account of his *daimonion* must be kept in mind throughout this concluding section of the dialogue.

As Socrates relates it, he has been, by divine dispensation, accompanied "from childhood" by something "demonic" (δαιμονιον), "a voice which, when it comes, always signals me to turn away from what I am going to do but never urges on, and if one of my friends (φιλων) consults with me, and the voice comes, it is the same – it turns away, and will not allow, the action" (128d4-7). Socrates claims to consider the *daimonion* a divine gift. It manifests itself as a "voice" which only Socrates can hear, and which impedes him from doing certain things. Obviously the voice does not hold Socrates back from all actions. Thus the voice

or *daimonion* is a discriminatory mechanism – it holds him back from some things, and while not urging on, allowing others by its silence. It essentially sanctions, then, those things which it is silent on; but as becomes clear, this is not equivalent to positive approval. The *daimonion* functions in the same way with Socrates' friends. It may not be of any relevance to those who consult with Socrates who are not his friends or who are unknown to him. When his friends consult and the voice comes, it is always to disallow the action. Of course, since only Socrates hears the voice, its judgment must be related to his friends by Socrates. And, as the examples attest, not all of Socrates' friends interpreted its refusal in the same way, and some may well have had doubts as to its existence.

Since the voice is something that others have no access to, and thus Theages could not know of it except by Socrates' explanation, Socrates will furnish "witnesses" for Theages. These witnesses provide examples of the *daimonion's* intervening when his friends made known to him that they were going to undertake some particular action. (We recall that a 'witness', as arose earlier in the dialogue (123b), would be someone who attests to the truth of what someone else claims). Thus Theages is implicitly being invited by Socrates to consider the truth of what he has said about the *daimonion* by speaking to others who can verify its predictive power, that is, whether his *daimonion* accurately predicted that what his friends were going to do was something which the outcome proved should not have been done. This implies, of course, that some of Socrates' friends have failed to obey, for whatever reason, his *daimonion's* command against the action, as Socrates relates this command to them. It will also

imply that his *daimonion* holds those back, when it comes, from actions that are harmful. Socrates' *daimonion* is concerned with his good and the good of those who are his friends.

Socrates' first example is Charmides, "who has become so beautiful" (128e1). When Charmides told Socrates that he was going to train to race in the Nemean games, before Charmides could even finish relating this to Socrates, "the voice came" and so Socrates opposed his training, saying, "just do not train". His *daimonion*, then, gave no reasons for its opposition; it is simply a command that must be obeyed. Nor does Socrates indicate that he 'understands' why it commands when and how it does. It seems he has learned to trust it implicitly.[29] In this case, we notice that Charmides must have had some prior familiarity with the *daimonion*, as he does not wonder what it is or ask Socrates about it. In fact, Charmides, according to Socrates, himself attempted to interpret the *daimonion's* command: "Probably it signals to you that I shall not win; but even if I am not going to win, if I exercise during this time, I shall be benefited" (128e6-8). Why would Charmides attempt to interpret it? He seems to believe in Socrates' *daimonion*, but is not willing to obey it unquestionably – attempting to 'second guess' the reasons for the *daimonion's* command. Socrates does not respond to Charmides' interpretation, nor does he relate what resulted. He merely suggests to Theages that it is "worth hearing" about what happened from Charmides himself, implying it was something bad. Whatever it was, Charmides, we note, did not die from failing to obey the *daimonion's* command. This first example, especially Socrates' withholding its outcome, would presumably have an enticing effect on

Theages, arousing his interest in what Socrates will further relate about his mysterious power.

Thus to test Theages' interest, Socrates begins the next example with "if you wish". Here Socrates first relates the result before telling Theages the story. This is the opposite to his procedure in the previous example where the result is left untold (which may appear as less effective evidence of the *daimonion's* 'reliability', but rhetorically it is likely to be quite intriguing to Theages). Socrates suggests Theages may ask Cleitomachus what his brother Timarchus told him on the way to his death, along with Euathlos who had offered Timarchus refuge after he fled for reasons Socrates has yet to reveal. Socrates thus offers the story to Theages. Theages' response indicates that he is curious to hear what was said.

Socrates tells Theages that Timarchus told his brother Cleitomachus that he was going to his death because "I was not willing to heed Socrates", and proceeds to relate the story as to why he said this. Timarchus was involved in a murder (or assassination) plot with Philemon to kill a certain Nicias.[30] When the two of them got up to leave a banquet that Socrates was also attending, Timarchus turned to Socrates and asked him what he thought, proclaiming he would be back later, "If I am lucky (τυχω)". Socrates' responded by urging Timarchus not to get up because his "accustomed" *daimonion* had signaled to him. Thus Timarchus stayed. It is unclear whether Philemon also held back or even heard what Socrates said. Maybe only Timarchus was a friend of Socrates. Again, Timarchus tells Socrates that he is leaving, but Socrates compelled him to hold back. Did Timarchus have doubts about the *daimonion's* veracity or existence? At the

beginning of Socrates' story, Timarchus is said to have not heeded Socrates; as Socrates reports it, Timarchus made no mention of the *daimonion*. Socrates says that the third time Timarchus waited until Socrates' attention was turned elsewhere, and then left, thereby escaping Socrates' notice. We might notice, then, that Socrates' *daimonion* did not signal him when he was not focused on Timarchus, although we may presume it would still have intervened in this case.

From Socrates' first two stories about his *daimonion*, we learn, first, that its commands are not to be interpreted; and second, that it is to be unquestionably obeyed, since disobedience to it results in harmful consequences. We should note also, though, that Socrates has not indicated that it never *fails* to signal a harmful action, nor that its silence can be relied upon as indicating a *good* outcome.

Socrates next suggests that Theages may now ask others what Socrates said about the expedition to Sicily which ended in disaster, presumably offering this as further evidence of the power of his *daimonion*, although we should note that Socrates does not actually mention this power here. Rather, he says that *he*, Socrates, said many things having to do with the destruction of the expedition. Moreover, it is not clear whether Socrates had a "friend" on the expedition nor whether anyone in particular consulted with Socrates. The possibility that Socrates had a friend on the expedition is overshadowed by another consideration: the 'architect' of this expedition was Alcibiades. Therefore, it may be possible that Socrates' predictive claims in this case could have been based on something else altogether, namely, his own prudential judgment. Nonetheless, he leaves the

rhetorical impression for Theages that his predictions were due to his *daimonion*. In this third example, then, Socrates subtly conflates himself and his *daimonion*.

Be this as it may, the first three examples are, then, of past events. But Socrates does not leave his account at these. Instead he tells Theages that "it is also possible to make trial now of the sign, to see if it does not say anything" (129d5-6). Here, Socrates relates that he believes that "the beautiful (καλον) Sannion", who is now on a military expedition, will either die or suffer something similar to this, and that Socrates is fearful for the rest of the army also. In this example, Socrates apparently did not intervene, nor does he indicate that Sannion consulted with him regarding whether he should go on the expedition (presuming he had any choice). Is Socrates' *daimonion* especially affected by beautiful human beings, without these necessarily being his "friends"? It seems the *daimonion* is not indifferent to beauty, or so Socrates' first and last examples suggest. However this may be, surely this last example would make a strong impression on Theages, if he was still in doubt from the previous three as to the claims Socrates has made regarding it. That is, Theages can now observe the outcome for himself, not leaving his understanding of the *daimonion* to Socrates' testimony, which he could dismiss as concocted from hindsight. Socrates preempts this possibility, with his last example, allowing for conformation of his *daimonion's* predictive power.[31]

Socrates now turns to explaining the relevance of these four examples. Presumably, they demonstrate how the *daimonion* is "all-powerful when it comes to the intercourse of those who spend time with me" (129e1-3). This, we recall,

was the initial reason Socrates gave for telling these stories of his *daimonion's* activity: to explain to Theages the nature of his relation to those who Theages has seen *benefited* by their intercourse with him. Therefore, the question arises as to the actual purpose of these previous four examples, since they do not seem immediately concerned with Socrates' being *beneficial* (or not) to certain young men, but rather with preventing harm to them. Socrates could have simply passed over those instances of his *daimonion* and turned immediately to recounting his relations with certain young men. It is incumbent upon us, then, to see why he did not. Thus, these cautionary 'tales' must be understood in terms of their intended effect on Theages (and possibly also Demodocus, as the nature of Theages and Socrates' potential intercourse is at issue here).

The first and second examples, as stated previously, seem to begin to outline the nature of Socrates' *daimonion*: they indicate that the *daimonion* is not to be interpreted and not to be disobeyed. The *daimonion's* interventions are commands; they are absolute. The nature of the *daimonion* seems to be tyrannical – it does not provide reasons for its signaling him. It is a power to which those who are commanded by it must acquiesce. These features of his *daimonion* would not have revealed themselves if Socrates had simply turned to the nature of his intercourse with other young men. The predictive or preventive power of his *daimonion* reveals itself most forcefully in the life and death 'political' examples that he uses to furnish evidence of this power. We must suppose Theages impressed, even dazzled, by Socrates' account; his silence throughout this section may indicate his enthrallment.[32] He does not claim here that he believes Socrates

to be jesting, as he did when Socrates attempted to speak of his 'knowledge' of the erotic things. Thus, when Socrates turns now to the account of his *daimonion* and its "power" in determining his relations with young men, he has, we imagine, Theages' 'undivided' attention.

Socrates, in effect, outlines a four category taxonomy of young men, based upon how his *daimonion* reacts to them and how they are affected by associating with Socrates. The first group are the "many" whom it opposes: these young men are those Socrates cannot spend time with because they can receive no benefit from his doing so. Thus his *daimonion*, allegedly concerned with the good of those whom he spends time with, will not allow him to spend time with this type. Socrates does not suggest that they may be positively harmed or 'corrupted', only that they would not profit from their association with him. But in light of his earlier four examples, this would seem a distinct possibility. The second group is again "many", but this type is not resisted by his *daimonion*. His *daimonion* does not prevent Socrates from spending time with this type but, nonetheless, they are not benefited by their intercourse with Socrates. Are they perhaps distinguished from the first group in that no harm would result? We should notice then, that the *daimonion* is not an infallible power – it does not turn away Socrates from certain young men whom he will not be able to benefit. Possibly it is only after their actually spending some time with him that Socrates himself realizes that they are not benefiting from his company. He does not say that the *daimonion* subsequently refuses to permit a continuing association. This contrasts with the first group who would not be benefited – a group that Socrates' *daimonion* is,

from the beginning, positively against his spending time with. Therefore, his *daimonion* is not a reliable indicator of positive good; and 'logically', as a preventative or protective power it is not without its shortcomings either, despite what the 'political' examples seemed to imply of its veracity.

The others are the youths Socrates claims Theages has noticed: "those whose intercourse the power of the *daimonion* contributes to…because they immediately make rapid progress" (129e7-130a1). They are also not one category, however, but divided in two. The one group are those who make progress and *retain* this benefit "in a firm and lasting way". But of those who progress, Socrates again speaks of "many" who make amazing progress while with Socrates, "but when they go away from me, are once again no different from anyone" (130a1-4). Socrates does not provide Theages with an example of this former type; indeed, he does not speak any further of those who make progress and retain this progress firmly for a long time. This type is apparently rather rare. Instead, he discusses extensively a complex example of the latter type: those who progress, but when they go away from Socrates lose any benefit they have acquired. But Socrates' account does not imply that the type who do retain the benefit always stay with him; they too may very well go away from him, but without losing the progress they have made. Thus, what distinguishes the two types is not whether they stay or leave Socrates' company, but rather whether they retain on their own the progress gained from associating with Socrates.

Socrates furnishes as an example of this type of young man Aristeides, son of Lysimachus, who himself was the son of the famous Aristeides 'the Just'. If we

turn to Plato's *Laches*, a dialogue preceding the *Theages* in dramatic order, we witness Socrates gradually become involved in a conversation with Lysimachus regarding the education of his son and his son's companion Thucydides, son of Melesias, who is himself the son of another Thucydides, also a renowned Athenian general and statesman. Both youths, then, are named after their illustrious grandfathers. Their fathers, though, are not themselves illustrious men, and have thus become concerned with the education of their sons (something their own fathers, they claim, did not attend to). The boys know of Socrates, but Lysimachus does not. Rather, the testimony of Laches and Nicias, Athenian generals who are the ones Lysimachus was originally consulting with regarding the education of the boys, leads Lysimachus to consult with Socrates on the question of what to do with the boys. At the end of the *Laches* Socrates agrees to continue this consideration of who the boys should be educated by, as Socrates and his interlocutors have concluded they are themselves in need of education. But Socrates does agree, on Lysimachus' urging, to come and see him tomorrow to continue the discussion. Or rather, Socrates will come, he says, "if god is willing" (*Laches* 201c6-7). Therefore, the *Theages* indicates that Socrates eventually did spend time with both Aristeides and his companion Thucydides, and the examples Socrates furnishes to Theages indicates what has transpired, at least in part, since the end of the *Laches*.

A more immediate question regarding the story in the *Theages*, however, is why Socrates gives an extensive example of this type of young man and not of the other type (those who maintain the progress they make with Socrates but do

not lose that progress, even when they leave Socrates). Could Socrates believe that Theages is the type who may lose the benefit he may acquire by spending time with him? Or is his *daimonion* able to determine this? Is it Socrates' experience that most of those who progress do not retain the progress they have made? Socrates had said that it is "many" who lose their amazing progress once they have gone away. This story thus seems to be intended as a warning to Theages: those who do not spend time with me continuously will, with the exception of few, lose their progress. Thus either Theages will become dispirited at this possibility or he will accept the uncertain outcome of his association with Socrates.

Socrates begins by saying that Aristeides made enormous progress in a short time with him. But Aristeides left on a military expedition. Socrates does not indicate whether or not his *daimonion* opposed this expedition, or Aristeides' accompanying it in particular. Be this as it may, when Aristeides returned, his companion Thucydides had since begun to spend time with Socrates, but he and the philosopher had quarreled the day before over some matters (what in particular Socrates does not say). Thus, when Aristeides approached Socrates upon his return, after they greeted one another and discussed other matters, he asked Socrates about his relationship with Thucydides. That Socrates has had many young men spend time with him is now apparent to Theages and Demodocus – Socrates does not spend his time exclusively with any one young man. He is sought out by many young men, including some from politically important families, and Theages may take note of this fact here. According to

Socrates, Aristeides asked him if it were indeed the case that Thucydides "bears himself in a solemn manner toward you and complains". Obviously, Aristeides must have heard something like this prior to his encounter here with Socrates. Socrates affirms that such is presently the case. Aristeides then asks Socrates if Thucydides does not know "what sort of slave he was" before he spent time with Socrates. Socrates indicates, with an oath, that it does not seem that Thucydides is aware of this. Thus we become aware that among those that Socrates accepts, there are types of young men who do not respond well to his company: either they receive no benefit from him or they respond unfavourably to his often probing questions. They thus leave his company still unaware of their ignorance and other limitations. Thucydides seems to have been the type of young man whom the *daimonion* does not oppose, but who do not acquire lasting benefit.

After this observation concerning Thucydides, Aristeides turns to describing his own case, which he claims is also "laughable". "Why exactly", Socrates asks. Because, Aristeides says, before he left on his expedition he was able to converse with anyone and "appear inferior to none in arguments". Thus he would search out "the most refined" to converse with them. But he now avoids those who seem most educated as he is ashamed of his "paltriness" (φαυλοτητι). The benefit, then, that Aristeides acquired from his intercourse with Socrates was the ability to win arguments. This agrees with the account Demodocus gives at the beginning of the dialogue of Theages' envy, and also of Theages' observation later in the dialogue that he knows boys who after spending time with Socrates show themselves superior to others whom they before appeared inferior to. This

may serve as a warning to Theages: the initial benefit that those who spend time with Socrates acquire is not necessarily lasting. Socrates seems to subtly suggest then that Theages must spend a long time with him: the true benefit for Theages, if he is not opposed but aided by the *daimonion*, will only be acquired over a long time. But what is the initial benefit that Socrates suggests some young men acquire? Is it not the ability to argue, or more precisely, the ability to imitate dialectics, such that they are able to appear superior to those around them? This is what Theages has noticed of others who have spent time with Socrates and what Aristeides experienced. But this 'dialectical skill' may be used in two ways: to pursue knowledge through a dialectical consideration of a question, but also, eristically, that is, to dispute with others, not for the sake of truth, but for the sake of victory. Thus, if the young man gets hold of this skill and realizes its power he may be tempted to leave Socrates. He will go around refuting others including, most importantly, those who formerly had control over him: his family, and particularly, his father.

Socrates now reports questioning Aristeides about the mysterious nature of his *daimonion's* 'contribution' to a young man's progress. Socrates asked Aristeides, "Which of two: did this power (δυναμις) leave you all at once, or little by little?" Aristeides replies that it left him "little by little". But now Socrates asks if this power came to Aristeides when he *learned* something from Socrates, or in some other way. Aristeides now tells Socrates something he insists is "incredible but true." He never learned anything from Socrates, as he claims that Socrates himself knows, but rather made progress when they were together

only in the same house, more when they were in the same room, and especially while touching Socrates and looking at him while he talked, as opposed to looking elsewhere. But now, Aristeides claims, this amazing progress has gone away.

How are we to understand this "incredible" claim of Aristeides that Socrates recounts here to Theages? We must begin by observing that Socrates knows that Aristeides never learned anything from him. Why does Socrates ask him this then? Is Aristeides making reference to Socrates' claim that he does not know anything, and thus does not claim to be able to teach others – to his professed ignorance? This claim may be intended to have an effect on Theages: to reaffirm that Socrates does not know anything.

In Plato's *Theaetetus*, Socrates relates a strikingly similar account of the experiences between himself and Aristeides. It is useful here to make a couple of observations about that dialogue and how it bears on the *Theages*. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates tells the young Theaetetus that he is "pregnant", not in his body, but in his soul (151b10-11). He is pregnant with something that his soul is attempting to bring forth. Thus Socrates proceeds to describe an ability he has: the art of midwifery. He utilizes this art to aid pregnant souls to bring forth "many beautiful things" from within them (150d5-8). A pregnant soul having brought something forth, Socrates judges whether it is true or whether it is an image and false. If it is a falsehood, he disposes of it; if it is true, he aids the young man in bringing up this discovery well. Socrates claims to be himself barren of wisdom in his soul; he can only help others to bring forth the offspring of their souls. It is "the god" who "compels" Socrates to midwife and prevents him from generating

(150c8-9). But "whomever the god allows" make amazing progress, according to both themselves and everyone else (150d2-4). Some then depart from Socrates earlier than they should, bringing up badly the things Socrates has midwifed, losing them and making much of other "false things and images"(150e5-7). Aristeides is one of the "very many different ones" to whom this has happened (151a2-3). Of these, then, some return to Socrates willing to do anything for his association again, but his *daimonion* comes and keeps some away, while allowing some others to associate with him. Those it allows will once again progress. The young men Socrates associates with, he continues, suffer labour pains in their perplexity, and it is by Socrates' art that he is capable of both inducing this perplexity and alleviating it. If Socrates realizes that some are not pregnant, presumably after his *daimonion* has allowed him to associate with them, then these he gives to other 'wise men', sophists who will apparently better benefit barren souls than would Socrates. Socrates, then, is also knowledgeable in this other lesser known aspect of midwifery: that of matchmaking. Presumably this is the bringing together of compatible souls.

In the *Theages*, then, we notice that Thucydides and Aristeides have both benefited and suffered from the experience Socrates describes here. Thucydides has possibly grown to despise Socrates as a result of his inability to bring up properly those things Socrates has aided him to give birth to from his soul. Socrates does not tell us in the *Theages* the result of Aristeides' return to his company. Specifically, Socrates does not here report his *daimonion's* rejecting Aristeides upon his return. Rather, Socrates concludes his account of Aristeides'

experience with him by observing that Theages' intercourse with him will be of this character: if "the god" (τω θεω) allows them to spend time together, Theages will progress most and quickly, but if the god rejects him he will not progress. Socrates leaves the decision to Theages – he may attempt to spend time with Socrates, but it may be "safer" for him to be with someone who is himself in charge of whatever can be conferred on such human beings. Such, for example, would be one of the sophists.[33] Theages' intercourse with Socrates is to be "according to what turns out by chance (τυχη)." Thus, it must appear to Theages that his intercourse with Socrates is dependant upon divine favour or acceptance. Socrates cannot be held responsible for whether matters turn out well or ill for him and Theages. We should note that Socrates has characterized his *daimonion* as a god here at the end of the dialogue.[34]

Theages is not dissuaded, however, by Socrates' story of Aristeides and Thucydides, nor by the *daimonion's* tyrannical commands concerning whom Socrates should spend time with, and what they must refrain from doing. On the contrary, he still chooses to spend time with Socrates, making a trial of the *daimonion* to see if it permits their intercourse. If so, then, he claims, this will be best (βελτιστα). But if not, then Theages suggests they should either deliberate whom to place him with, or attempt to placate "the divine thing" (το θειου) with prayers and sacrifices. Theages has willingly submitted himself to the rule of Socrates, or of Socrates' *daimonion*. Socrates' purpose was not really to dissuade Theages from wanting to spend time with him, since it is difficult to understand this account of his *daimonion* as other than a temptation, at least to a certain type

of young man. Socrates' account of these other young men presents itself, it seems, as a contest or challenge, especially to a spirited and willful young man such as Theages. Be this as it may, Demodocus now agrees with Theages' proposal; he urges Socrates not to oppose the youth any longer, as what Theages says is "well spoken"(131a9). Socrates, still with seeming reluctance, agrees that he will do things as it seems they must be done.

Socrates accedes to father and son, who are still in complete agreement themselves as to what is to be done. Demodocus apparently believed Socrates to be resisting his son's request, and certainly Socrates appeared to be doing just that. Despite this, however, we cannot presume that Socrates is not interested in Theages. We may only presume that Socrates is uncertain as to Theages' potential, that is, the benefit that Theages may acquire from spending time with Socrates. Indeed, although one cannot conclude anything for certain from his *daimonion's* silence (thus far) as to Socrates' association with Theages, the youth may be one who will progress from such an association. His responses to Socrates' questions in this dialogue certainly seem to improve compared to his complete inability to articulate himself at the beginning of their discussion. Theages' prior inability to articulate what he desires, especially by virtue of his being a young man, is not sufficient proof that he lacks philosophic potential. Still, we noted that Socrates' *daimonion* is not infallible – it does not resist all those who ultimately do not progress. And Theages may prove to progress only as Aristeides does; that is, so long as he stays with Socrates he may progress rather well.

But we know from what Socrates observes in the *Republic*, that Theages turned out to be one of those few who "keep company with philosophy in a way that's worthy" (496a11-b1), although he only refrained from politics due to his sickly body.[35] Thus, Theages may in fact have progressed well precisely by being kept away from politics by chance (as Socrates also kept away from politics due to the *daimonion's* opposition)[36]; he surely was not at risk to leave on any expeditions as Aristeides did. This, of course, does not recommend him as the highest type – he may not be able to bring up well those things Socrates is able to midwife from his soul. But his mention, by name, in the *Republic* seems most significant, as no other type of young man worthy to keep company with philosophy is mentioned there, although surely Socrates could have done so. Socrates then did spend time with Theages: his *daimonion* did not oppose Theages after this dialogue (as the *Republic* must have taken place after the *Theages* dramatically given that Socrates had not met Theages before this dialogue) and we learn nothing regarding Socrates having placed Theages with any sophist, as he was in certain cases willing to do, that is, for those he did not want to spend time with or whom his *daimonion* opposed.

Conclusion

Socrates' mention of Theages in the *Republic*, which occurs in the midst of a discussion of the philosophic nature, directs us to the *Theages*. The question that the *Theages* raises, particularly through the action of the dialogue, concerns Socrates' pedagogy and how he attempted to bring the best natures to philosophy. As the *Republic* indicates, those who are worthy to keep company with philosophy may be drawn to it from different circumstances. Chance, though, does play a role in all of Socrates' examples of the philosophic nature in the *Republic*. Chance has also played a role in the *Theages*. We recall that it was by chance that Demodocus encountered Socrates on his way to placing Theages with a sophist. And as Socrates indicates at the end of the dialogue, his own relationship with Theages, because it is dictated by the *daimonion*, is to render their potential association as determined by chance. What does this mean? What aspect of their association will be determined by chance? We might suggest that we are meant to acknowledge the nature of each soul as fundamentally determined by what we call "chance"; a power outside of our control. The *eros* of any human being is given by the apparent 'lottery' of nature; it is by chance that each of us has whatever kind of nature we have. Perhaps this is why Socrates speaks of his own nature, of the peculiarities of his own erotic nature, as a *daimonion*. He experiences this erotic drive to philosophize as essentially tyrannical; it seems he cannot choose *not* to philosophize.[37] Nevertheless, Socrates' own claim is that he knows only the erotic things, but that in this he is "clever" beyond all human beings. But what kind of claim to know is his

cleverness? How are we to understand his erotic wisdom? Socrates may recognize the distinctive kinds of *eros* in different human beings; he understands their dominant loves, the various objects that their *eros* is directed towards. This is not to say that the mystery of why we love what we love is fully clarified by this claim. Thus Socrates can speak of his *eros* as demonic since it comes to him when it does, without knowing why it comes when it does. *Eros* is both intelligible and mysterious – it is between the divine and the human.[38] It is due to this "mystery" that Socrates may indeed be interested in observing the *eros* of other human beings.

These general remarks may aid us in understanding the *Theages* as a whole. We recall that the *Theages* comes down to us with the subtitle "On Wisdom". Philosophy – the love of wisdom – is itself one love amongst many. Each human being's *eros*, it seems, includes a desire to understand some things, but only rarely is it someone's dominant drive. Theages is not necessarily a lover of wisdom, however much he believes he wants to become "wise". Theages, at least initially, knows nothing about wisdom; he is concerned with victory: he wants to become "wise" so that he may win arguments against his companions. He believes that he is losing these arguments because they are "wise" and he is ignorant. By the end of the dialogue, we may wonder whether this is still Theages' primary concern. Socrates has admitted to knowing none of the "blessed and noble" things that Theages claims he desires (128b1-2). Nonetheless, Theages wants to be with Socrates. Theages may feel himself being benefited by Socrates; that is, he may be beginning to understand his deeper desire. Through Socrates,

Theages has been awakened to the need for self-knowledge, and in so doing, he seems to have become attracted to Socrates.

Socrates has a peculiar ability to draw many young men to himself, including some of the very best among them (it suffices to mention Plato). But, while Socrates is attractive to many young men, he was not necessarily himself attracted to all those who were attracted to him. Socrates was, however, attracted to, and interested in, some of them, and thus he attempts to cultivate relationships with these young men.[39] But, although Socrates' *daimonion* may not be indifferent to beauty, we cannot assume that Socrates was simply attracted to beautiful bodies. Socrates' account of his *daimonion* indicates, at least in part, his or the *daimonion's* concern with the benefit of those he spends time with, as it rejects those whom it seems will not receive any benefit. Socrates has come to understand through experience that his *daimonion* opposes those that cannot be benefited. The *daimonion* of Socrates is concerned, at least incidentally, with the good of those around him. Thus Socrates' concern is with the quality or beauty of their souls, and not simply with physical beauty. But the beauty of a soul is often not immediately discernable. We have all had the experience of 'getting to know' someone, and afterward they turn out to be, contrary to our initial impression, better or worse than we expected. But we nonetheless had an initial impression and it may be the inexplicability of this impression that, in part, the story of the *daimonion* is intended to articulate. The *daimonion*, or Socrates' initial judgment on the potential of a soul, though, is not infallible. The *daimonion* only accurately judges those who are immediately unattractive to Socrates. However, Socrates

admits spending time conversing with some who received no benefit from their association with him, and with others who would eventually leave him without being permanently improved. A few though do presumably retain the benefit they have acquired. Nonetheless, Socrates' ability to attract young men is not matched by the *daimonion's* ability to discern unerringly only the best young men.

To further indicate this, we observe that Socrates also gives us an example of one who left him after a quarrel: Thucydides. We are apt to imagine Thucydides as the instigator of this quarrel as it is difficult to imagine Socrates quarrelling. What is the example of Thucydides meant to illustrate to Theages and to us? Is it not possible that, besides losing whatever benefit that he acquired while with Socrates, Thucydides was actually "harmed" by their association? In Socrates' attempt to converse with him, was Thucydides exposed to certain arguments or 'dialectics', but without having acquired the sense of responsibility to use them properly? And did acquiring this skill tempt Thucydides to seek out others in the attempt to refute them? Indeed Thucydides, and those like him, may never have acquired anything but this skill from Socrates; that is, after listening to him, they imitated his examination of human beings, revealing their ignorance. They may have found these examinations pleasant, but perhaps resisted having Socrates' examinations turned onto themselves.

However this may be, Socrates was not able to cultivate or "midwife" something from the soul of every young man; the nature of certain souls may not only have been incapable of benefiting from Socrates, but actually could have been made worse. Socrates, in his story to Theages regarding the *daimonion*, was

silent on the possibility of certain young men being harmed by their association with him – he only spoke of their being, or not being, benefited (129e3-130a4). Is this a risk that Socrates necessarily takes, and is the "corruption" of certain young men an acceptable risk of introducing young men to philosophical examination?[40]

The dialogue tempts us to answer in the affirmative that Socrates' philosophical activity, an activity that requires interlocutors, places some of those who hear his questioning at risk. Theages' recounting of Socrates' argument regarding the worthlessness of the sons of political men shows that, even aside from the dialectical skill to refute others, those who hear Socrates' examinations could appropriate potentially hazardous opinions. It is such a statement that led in part to Socrates' reputation as a "corrupter" of the youth, and thus, ultimately, to his trial.[41]

But can this risk be avoided? As we observed, the *daimonion*, as Socrates presents it here, does not act as a perfect 'safeguard' against those who will not benefit from their association with him. Even the most 'promising' natures may leave Socrates, and not be able to act on his exhortations to virtue. The greatest example is, of course, Socrates' erstwhile companion Alcibiades. Alcibiades seems to share this similarity with Aristeides: by the account Plato has him give in the *Symposium*, he is able to benefit only while he is with Socrates. But unlike Aristeides, Alcibiades left Socrates not by chance, *i.e.* a military expedition, but because he was "incapable of contradicting him or of saying that what he commands must not be done".[42] Thus, having had this experience with Socrates and unable to resist the lure of politics, he fled Socrates' company. His speech in

the *Symposium* reveals that, once apart from Socrates, he was still susceptible to the flattery of the many – Alcibiades' *eros* may have been overly preoccupied with honour. He was persuaded by the truth of Socrates' speeches, but would flee him to avoid the shame he experienced at not acting in accordance with their agreements.[43] Aristeides does not seem to have had this experience. Rather, his loss of benefit was shameful to him because he was no longer able to converse with those whom he believed to be educated.[44] Although these young men were both companions of Socrates who would eventually leave him, it is not clear that they are of the same nature. Indeed, Socrates may have taken even greater risks with those natures he believed had the greater natural potential. These natures are often those that the city also recognizes as best. It was Socrates' relationship with Alcibiades in particular that the many believed to be evidence of his corrupting influence.

The *Theages*, we are tempted to say, allows Socrates' possible corrupting influence to fade into the background. Instead, we are witness to Socrates' philosophic activity as conveyed through the action of the *Theages* in general, and through his story of Aristeides in particular. The action of the dialogue is a demonstration of Socrates' erotic wisdom. We are witness to the harmonization that Socrates' achieves between Demodocus and Theages. Father and son have very different concerns, but Socrates in conversation with both of them, is nevertheless able to reconcile these differing concerns. And their concerns are "erotic concerns": Theages' desire for victory, at least initially, and Demodocus' paternal concern, borne out of love for his son, that he not become corrupted, but

rather become the best possible. But in addition to Socrates' achievement in the *Theages*, we must wonder as to Socrates' motives in this dialogue, and in his concern for, or interest in, the youth generally.

Socrates tells the story to Theages regarding his association with Aristeides as an example to illustrate what type of association he and Theages may have. As we have observed, this example indicates to Theages that it may be harmful for him to leave Socrates 'prematurely'– Aristeides lost his progress by going away from Socrates, or by going away too soon. Thus Theages, if he wants to avoid the same fate, must be prepared to stay with him for an indeterminate amount of time. Furthermore, the story of Thucydides within the story of Aristeides may suggest to Theages that Socrates is indeed the beloved and not the lover – Socrates does not seem particularly troubled by Thucydides leaving him. Socrates does not pursue Thucydides in the attempt to reconcile their association. But there is another aspect to the story. Socrates' erotic wisdom may be due, in part, to the type of examination that is depicted in his relationship with Aristeides. Socrates may have observed of Aristeides and the other young men he has spent time with the nature of his influence upon them. If these examinations are the sort of philosophic activity that Plato depicts in the dialogues, they raise the question as to the benefit that Socrates himself acquired from spending his leisure examining young men. May they have been the source of his erotic wisdom? If Socrates' understanding of *eros* has been refined by examinations of the sort we are told he pursued with Aristeides, then the *Theages* may depict a Socrates who has become an expert in dealing with the youth. On this assumption, we must

suppose that Socrates wants to attract Theages to himself. Why would Socrates be interested in Theages? Socrates' account of the *daimonion* has shown, upon closer examination, to be unable to prevent Socrates from associating with natures that will not be benefited. This does not imply, though, that Socrates himself, does not use his 'dialectical skills' to assess these natures. Indeed, Socrates may well be the most able of "psychologists". He is able to generate a desire in Theages to be with him. But this then must be for a further purpose, as it is inadequate to believe that Socrates simply wanted to spend his time with the youth. It seems Socrates' philosophical activity must partake of the examination of the young and promising.

Therefore, before examining what may have been Socrates' purpose, we must consider what it is that differentiates the youth from the other types of human beings that Socrates examines. We could suggest it is their impressionability, or rather, their openness to novel considerations. The youth are not as completely formed by the opinions of the city as an old Athenian citizen like Demodocus.[45] Certain discussions may not be able to occur in the presence of older gentlemen.[46] Thus Socrates' interest in the youth may be in their openness to certain questions that older citizens are no longer open to. The citizen qua citizen is the possessor and propagator of the opinions of the city, especially regarding the most important matters (*e.g.* justice, piety, and so on). The youth must be educated in these opinions, which is to say that they do not yet fully share, as young men, all of the opinions of the city. Moreover, since the civic education will necessarily contain, unbeknownst to itself, conflicting or even

contradictory opinions on the most important matters, the best natures who are able to discern this will ultimately remain unsatisfied with this education.

With these considerations in mind, we may return to Socrates' association with the youth. Indeed, it seems Socrates is both interested in, and concerned with, the youth. Socrates' concern for the youth may be part of his interest in the youth. We assume his interest must be somehow connected to his philosophic activity. What is this activity? As we witness it in the Platonic dialogues, it is a dialogic activity that proceeds through examinations with others. Socrates' philosophic activity appears as examinations and exhortations of the young men around him. Plato presents it to us as a way of life – that Socrates spent his life in this activity, and would refuse to live any other way of life.[47] But this way of life is necessarily in contact with other ways of life that also claim to be the best way of life. Thus the philosopher in the city investigates those other ways of life, particularly those that claim to benefit the city. The philosopher must then attempt to defend philosophy as beneficial for the city.

In Aristophanes' portrayal of Socrates in his *Clouds*, a comedy resembling the *Theages* in certain important respects, we are presented a critique of Socrates' philosophic activity as being parasitic on the city. Socrates takes young men into the "thinkery" and away from the city; his philosophic activity, as depicted in the play, is oblivious to the concerns of the city. Most notably, it sets sons against their fathers and the ways of their fathers. Yet no defense of philosophy is offered by Aristophanes' Socrates to support his philosophic activity. His Socrates neglects the city – he is not concerned with the political things that the city is

concerned with because he is not concerned with the human things at all. Aristophanes portrays Socrates as unerotic. He does not concern himself with, but rather undermines, the civic virtue of the young men around him because he is not mindful of philosophy's reliance upon the city. Aristophanes' Socrates is only concerned with "nature", that is, with natural philosophy. But if the political and the human things are necessary to the study of the natural or supernatural things, then the one studying the natural things must first attempt to understand his own desire and capacity for this knowledge or wisdom. The conclusion of the *Clouds*, with Socrates' "thinkery" being burned down and his being chased out of the city, shows us that Socrates' neglect of the city, whatever other consequences it has, results in the destruction of his means to pursue natural philosophy.

But Plato's Socrates is not Aristophanes' Socrates. Plato's Socrates is concerned with the political things. He turns to an examination of the city out of both a concern for philosophy, and for understanding his own erotic drive to philosophize. Socrates is concerned with defending philosophy before the city, so as to find a place for philosophy to exist in the city. It must remain a question here whether Socrates was able to defend philosophy before *all* those in the city.[48] At any rate, if Socrates' primary concern is with understanding his own philosophic drive, then his concern with philosophy's place in the city is derivative from his concern to know his own desire. He is concerned with understanding his own love of wisdom. Socrates' *daimonion*, or his erotic nature is, by his own admission, a peculiarity.[49] Socrates' own *eros* is a mysterious power even to him. But Socrates nonetheless undertakes the attempt to understand his own *eros*. This attempt

needs a dialogic environment because Socrates needs dialogic partners with whom to converse. Socrates thus concerns himself with the young men of the city for the sake of cultivating those who are his kin, that is, those whose natures are suited for philosophy and who may partake of the philosophic life. And as the *Theages* shows, Socrates does this while still being mindful of the erotic concerns of the family and the city.

Plato's *Theages* is an example of Socrates' philosophic activity. To understand this activity more fully, we would of course have to study the other Platonic dialogues. Because each dialogue is framed by its dramatic context, one would need to consider the other dialogues that depict Socrates' philosophic activity, noticing how Plato's portrait of Socrates varies from dialogue to dialogue according to the differing dramatic contexts. Indeed, almost all of the Platonic dialogues are examples of Socrates' philosophic activity. Each dialogue's dramatic setting is a partial investigation by Socrates of a particular question, since Socrates is always in conversation with a certain interlocutor or interlocutors. We note that there is no Platonic dialogue between Socrates and Plato, that is, between two men of the best nature. However this may be, the purpose of the *Theages* in particular is to illuminate one of Socrates' most famous relationships: his relationship to the youth. The *Theages* may be *the* portrait of Socrates' peculiar wisdom whereby he attracts the youth. Much of the difficulty in understanding the *Theages* involves the questions it raises regarding precisely how *eros* and Socrates' *daimonion* affect his relationship to the youth. The problem of understanding *eros*, then, seems to be at the root of the question of the

nature of Socrates' philosophic activity, since this activity as depicted in the dialogues always involves other human beings, the youth in particular. Understanding his relationship to the youth is a necessary part of understanding the nature of his philosophic activity, as an "erotic" activity, and peculiar to Socrates.

Notes

Introduction

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[1] Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato*, trans. William Dobson, Cambridge, 1836, pg. 321.
[2] Shorey, P. *What Plato Said*, Chicago, 1933, pg. 429.
[3] Lamb, W.R.M. "Introduction to the Theages" in *Plato: Charmides, Alcibiades I and II, Hipparchus, Lovers, Theages, Minos, Epinomis*, vol. XII, Loeb Classical Library, 1955, pg. 345.
[4] Strauss, Leo, "On Plato's Republic" in *The City and Man*, University of Chicago Press, 1964, pg. 55.
[5] Cf. the "Appendix" to Seth Benardete's unpublished Master's thesis *The Daimonion of Socrates: A Study of Plato's Theages*, Chicago, 1953, for a more detailed discussion of the textual objections to the *Theages*.
[6] Cf. *Phaedrus* 275d4-276a7.
[7] For a more exhaustive account of how to read a Platonic dialogue, the following should be consulted: Leon H. Craig's *The War Lover: A Study of Plato's Republic*, Jacob Klein's "Introductory Remarks" to *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* and his *Plato's Trilogy: Theaetetus, Sophist, Statesman*, Leo Strauss' *The City and Man*, particularly the first 12 pages of the chapter "On Plato's Republic". There are certainly others, but these are the best of those I have read.
[8] "On Plato's Republic" *in The City and Man*, pg. 54.
[9] *Ibid.*, pg. 52.
[10] Cf. *Phaedrus* 264b7-c5

Commentary

[11] This is a verbal cognate of the term for "chance" – τυχη.
[12] Compare, for example, *Republic* 327c-328b2
[13] The literal meaning of this word as "wise one" should be kept in mind throughout Demodocus' speech here, and the dialogue as a whole.
[14] Cf. *Hippias Major* 282d6-e6
[15] See, for example, *Lovers* or *Charmides*, particularly the opening remarks of Socrates.
[16] I have used the term "learnable" here because it avoids the word "knowledge" (επιστημη) which is important at other points in the dialogue, and thus should remain differentiated.
[17] If the charge against Socrates regarding his not believing in the gods stems from the charges against Anaxagoras or the natural philosophers generally, then the charge of corrupting the youth may stem from what the city believes the sophists are guilty of. The city cannot distinguish between natural philosophy, sophistry, and Socrates.
[18] This exact quotation, again attributed to Euripides, occurs in the *Republic* during the investigation of the tyrannic soul and tyranny. Cf. 568b1-2.
[19] If we consider that the poets generally speaking teach about love and/or war, we may consider that what the tyrant could learn from the poet is the desires of men, something that seems not simply reducible to an art, as Socrates speaks here of an art of rule. Therefore some understanding of man's *eros* would be the prerequisite for the transition from tyrannical rule, as Theages crudely but possibly accurately characterizes it as rule by force, to political rule which requires some willingness on behalf of those being ruled. This willingness is generally achieved through an appeal to the common good; that all those in the polity will benefit more or less from the arrangement the ruler proposes. This is indeed so much the case that even most tyrants of any perception would understand that it would be to their advantage to at least appeal to this common good initially, thereby reducing possible resistance to their rule.

[20] The Greek word δεινος has two different, but related, meanings. It can mean either "clever" or "terrible". Thus there is always an ambiguity in the Greek and Plato surely seems to exploit this ambiguity. The double meaning of this word may best be understood in an English expression such as "terribly clever" or "devilishly clever", suggesting a knowledge or wisdom that is not simply good, similar to the derogatory term used for the sophists: "wise ones" as meaning "wise guys" or clever speakers.
[21] The density of Theages' oaths in this section is an indication of someone agreeing emphatically due to having something revealed to them.
[22] Cf. *Laches*: Lysimachus' speech 179a3-b5, c6-d2 with Laches' response 180b1-6.
[23] This contrast with the beginning of the *Laches*, where the fathers Lysimachus and Melesias have already begun to attend to their sons education before the sons have made any demands on them, as Theages has done to Demodocus in this dialogue.
[24] Cf. *Meno* 93d and *Alcibiades I* 118c3-6.
[25] "Gentleman" in Greek is literally "noble and good" – καλων καγαθων.
[26] The deeper philosophic question for Socrates would be whether he is a "gentleman", that is, "noble and good". But for Demodocus and Theages this is not an issue. Demodocus would not be consulting with Socrates if he did not believe Socrates to be a gentleman, in the conventional Greek sense. Thus it is inadequate to believe that Socrates' response here is a result of his not being able to answer this question – surely Socrates could have answered in a manner that both suggested he is a gentleman while also simultaneously calling this same claim into doubt.
[27] This is not to deny of course that Socrates often has the sophists agree that they teach human virtue or good citizenship, an agreement the sophists could only avoid with much trouble and misunderstanding on the part of any potential students.
[28] This contrasts markedly with the beginning of the *Protagoras*.
[29] In the *Apology*, Socrates claims that the *daimonion's* opposition to his political activity "seems to me altogether noble" (31d6-7). Socrates also claims that he would have perished if he had not followed this *daimonion's* command on this matter. Socrates here, then, reasons about the command and rationally justifies his obedience to it.
[30] This is not the Nicias that appears in the other Platonic dialogues such as the *Laches*.
[31] Theages will later pick up on this notion of "making a trial" of the *daimonion* when he suggest to Socrates that they should "make a trial of the *daimonion* by keeping company with one another" (131a1-2). Thus, we may observe that Theages still has it in mind at this point, i.e. before Socrates turns to his account of how the *daimonion* affects those who spend time with him, that Socrates is the one he wants to be with.
[32] Cf. *Symposium* 215d2-5.
[33] Socrates does not explicitly mention the sophists though and thus there does exist an ambiguity here as to whom in fact "benefits" human beings. Obviously he does not say with a view to what, that is good citizens or good man, and this formulation of the one who benefits does not strictly rule out Theages' father Demodocus.
[34] Socrates proceeds similarly in the *Theaetetus*, but there he reverses the order of introduction: he first speaks of the god and the god's role in his midwifery and then goes on to speak about his *daimonion* as that which resists certain young men.
[35] This is further evidence for doubting that Socrates was actually attempting to dissuade Theages from wanting to spend time with him.
[36] Cf. *Apology of Socrates* 31d6-7.

Conclusion

[37] Cf. *ibid.* 29c1-d7, 37c5-38a2.
[38] Cf. *Symposium* 203e5-204a3.
[39] Cf. especially the beginning of the *Lovers*; also consider Socrates' unspoken third motive at the beginning of the *Republic* for going down to the Piraeus (*i.e.*, he goes to the festival with Glaucon); and Alcibiades' claim in the *Symposium* 222b1-4.
[40] Cf. *Republic* 497d10-11.

[41] Cf. *Meno* 94e3-95a6.
[42] *Symposium* 216b3-5, trans. Seth Benardete, University of Chicago Press, 2001.
[43] Cf. *Symposium* 216a2-c4.
[44] Cf. *Theages* 130c4-6.
[45] Theages comes to light in the early stages of this dialogue as rebellious against the wishes of his elderly father.
[46] Consider the significance of Cephalus' departure early in the action of the *Republic*. It could be that Socrates' examination of Cephalus, that is, the particular questions he asks him, facilitates his departure. And his departure may be a necessary condition for the questions that are raised that evening. Socrates may not have been able, with propriety, to introduce certain questions in the presence of Cephalus.
[47] Cf. *Apology of Socrates* 29c2-d7.
[48] Cf. Alfarabi, "The Philosophy of Plato, its parts, the rank of its parts, from its beginning to its end" in *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, Part II, Section 36.
[49] Cf. *Republic* 496c4-6.

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Note: The dialogues of Plato are listed according to the translator of the edition used.

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